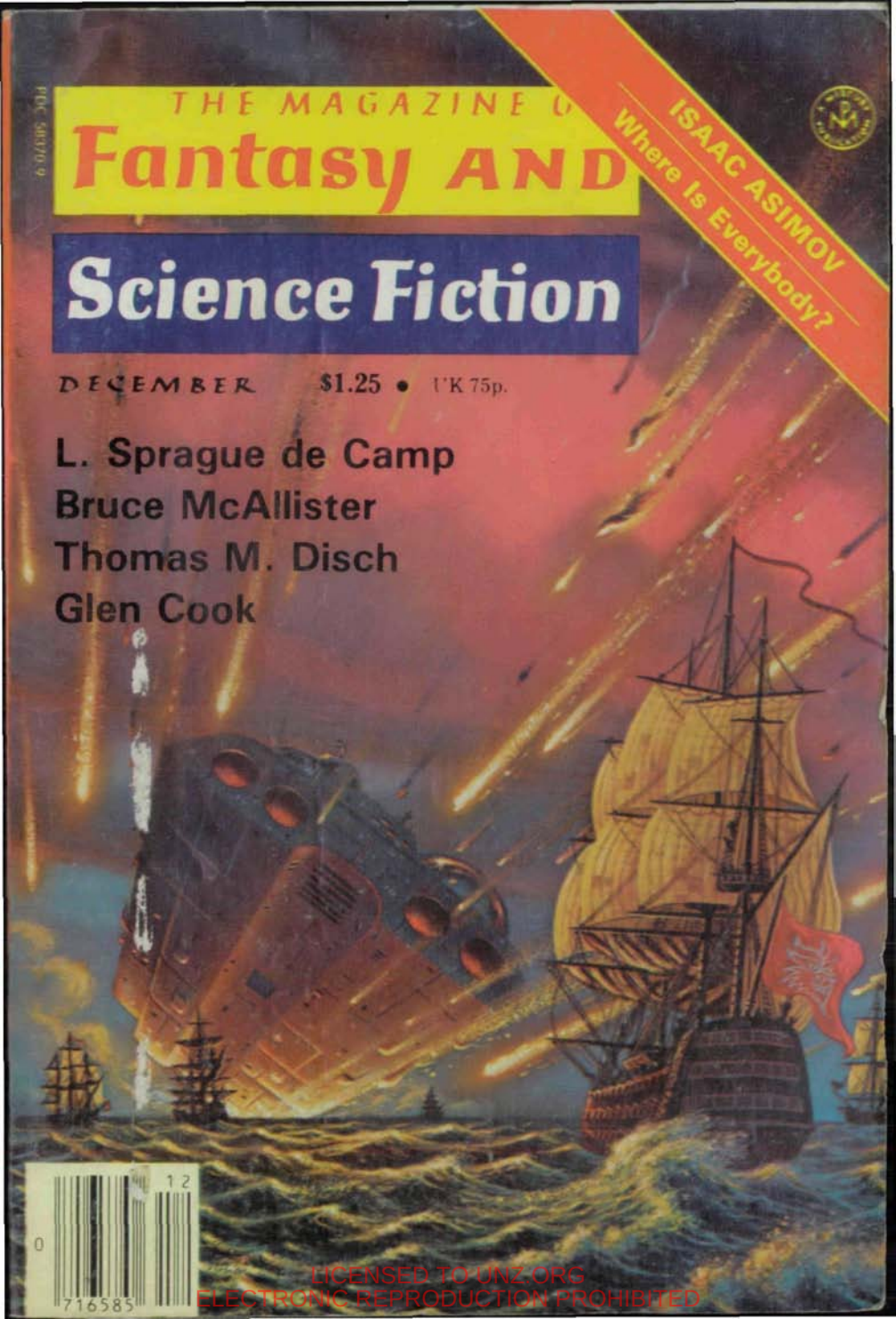
THE MAGAZINE O
Fantasy AND
Science Fiction

DECEMBER $1.25 • U.K. 75p.

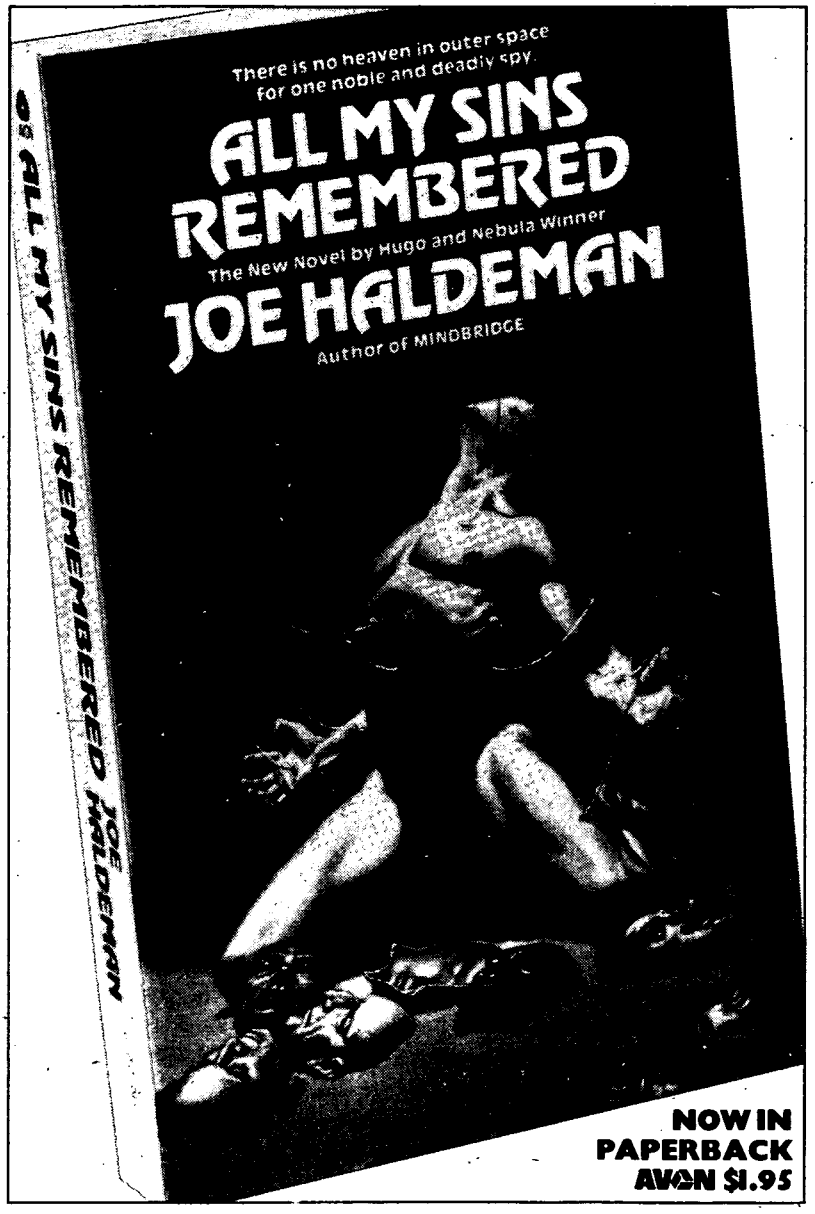
ISAAC ASIMOV
Where Is Everybody?

L. Sprague de Camp
Bruce McAllister
Thomas M. Disch
Glen Cook



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

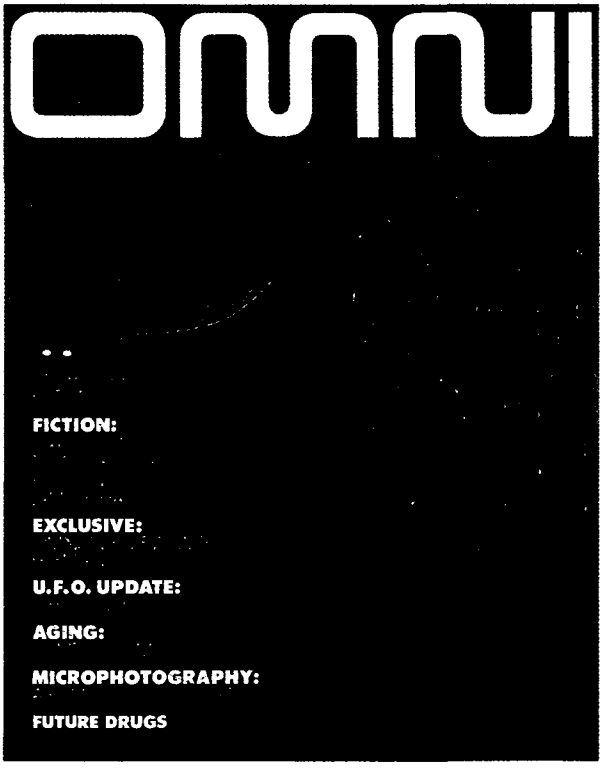

There is no heaven in outer space
for one noble and deadly spy.
ALL MY SINS REMEMBERED
The New Novel by Hugo and Nebula Winner
JOE HALDEMAN
Author of MINDBRIDGE
NOW IN PAPERBACK
AVON $1.95
ALL MY SINS REMEMBERED JOE HALDEMAN

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ANNOUNCING
OMNI*

THE MOST SPECTACULARLY BEAUTIFUL NEW STAR
IN THE COMMUNICATIONS GALAXY

THE SCIENCE FICTION OF YOUR CHILDHOOD
IS THE SCIENCE FACT OF TODAY



*FORMERLY NOVA

YOU ARE INVITED TO SUBSCRIBE NOW UNDER
OUR SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY CHARTER OFFER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OMNI — THE FIRST MAGAZINE TO COMBINE SCIENCE FICTION WITH SCIENCE FACT

Each stunning monthly issue of OMNI will be bringing into your home — and into your life — the thoughts, the dreams, the accomplishments of the men and women who have changed the course of history and transformed the world we live in. The roster of international luminaries who will be writing for OMNI or captured in revealing and candid interviews includes:

Alvin Toffler, Buckminster Fuller, Stanley Kubrick, Rene Dubos, Paul Ehrlich, Lewis Mumford, Frances Crick, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Edward Teller, Jonas Salk, Margaret Mead, Jacques-Yves Cousteau, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Fred Hoyle, Ray Bradbury, Frank Herbert, A.E. Von Vogt, and Poul Anderson . . . as well as the best of the exciting new writers.

Visually, OMNI will be a truly extravagant feast for the eye. Printed on heavy enameled paper, it will reproduce the genius of world-renowned artists and photographers — all in colors so true, so alive, they will seem to jump off the page.

Come into the future with OMNI.

OMNI CHARTER RESERVATION — 25 PERCENT SAVINGS

Omni Subscription Department
P.O. Box 908
Farmingdale, N.Y. 11737

YES! Enclosed is $18 for a one-year (12 issues) introductory subscription to OMNI at the special Charter Rate — a saving of $6 under what others will pay at the newsstand at $2.00 per issue.

Mr./Ms. _____
(Please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Payment Must Accompany Order. FOD78

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantasy and Science Fiction

Including Venture Science Fiction

DECEMBER • 30th YEAR OF PUBLICATION

NOVELETS

QUIET SEA	GLEN COOK	7
CONCEPTS	THOMAS M. DISCH	89

SHORT STORIES

THE YELLOW MAN	L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP	31
THE WIND AMONG THE MINDYMUNS	JOSEPH GREEN and PATRICE MILTON	50
BE JUBILANT MY FEET!	GARY JENNINGS	66
THE HUMANIC COMPLEX	RAY RUSSELL	84
MISSIONARY WORK	BRUCE MCALLISTER	139

DEPARTMENTS

FILMS: *Whimsy One*	BAIRD SEARLES	47
CARTOON	GAHAN WILSON	65
SCIENCE: *Where Is Everybody?*	ISAAC ASIMOV	128
INDEX TO VOLUME 55		162

Cover by David Hardy for "Quiet Sea"

Edward L. Ferman, EDITOR & PUBLISHER — Isaac Asimov, SCIENCE COLUMNIST
Dale Farrell, CIRCULATION MANAGER — Audrey Ferman, BUSINESS MANAGER
Anne W. Burke, ASSISTANT EDITOR

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 55, No. 6, Whole No. 331; Dec. 1978. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc. at $1.25 per copy. Annual subscription $12.50; $14.50 outside of the U.S. Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices.

Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 1978 by Mercury Press, Inc. All rights, including translations into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Glen Cook's last story here was a sea-going fantasy titled "Ghost Stalk" (May 1978), which proved very popular. This new story is an immensely entertaining science fiction tale about an Earthman who is shipwrecked on the quiet sea of another world.

Quiet Sea

by GLEN COOK

With dawn a hundred doves unfurled their varicolored wings upon the quiet sea, fluttering nervously. The waves ran gentle now, but during the night the earth beneath the deep had groaned and shaken like a brunwhal in its death throes. Ahead lay deep blue water, cool Fenaja water from the arctic, but Rickli sensed no danger. They would reach the Pimental Bank before noon. Meanwhile, he would mend sail, ignoring the aches in his heart and leg, and daydream of mountains, forests, and snow. Maybe later, when they got ready to put the seines over the side and he would only be in the way, he would limp down to the galley and swap lies with the Shipwrecked Earthman and help sharpen scaling knives.

Such were the thoughts of Rickli Manlove at dawn on the Ninth of Eel in the year 666 of the local reckoning. The Shipwrecked Earthman prefered 3060. He had lost count of his months and days. After a few years he had given up trying.

Rickli, too, had given up. It had been a year since the Fenaja harpoon had shattered his knee. For months he had hoped, but, finally, he'd had to accept the truth: never again would he ride the bowsprit of a racing chaser and, with the salty spray stinging his eyes and soaking his beard, plant his harpoon in the glistening back of a fleeing brunwhal. Nor would he ever again trade insults and harpoons with the cruel Fenaja.

Once the crew had named him Left Hand Sea Terror. Now he was only The Crippled Sailmaker. So it went. So it went. He bore the Fenaja no special malice. They had done what they'd had to do, as did Man. When the grunling weren't running, the blackfin were.

He wet a finger, held it up,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sniffed, and considered the bow of the sails. The breeze was barely sufficient to keep way on. An inauspicious sign at dawn. The fleet could become becalmed. The Fenaja would be hard pressed to resist such temptation.

But there was no feeling of danger in the deep blue water. Perhaps the Fenaja were elsewhere.

Far over the quiet sea, shell horns winded. A chaser's mainsail fat-bellied in the breeze. Throughout the fleet youngsters scrambled into the rigging to watch. The brunwhal were the most valuable, and most cunning, creatures of the deep. The Children of the Sky used everything but the name.

The Shipwrecked Earthman had been amazed that they remembered their offworld origins after so many centuries. But many things had amazed him here, their survival most of all.

Rickli and the Earthman were almost friends, close enough that the Earthman had confided that he wasn't an Old Earther at all but a colonial from a world called Bronwen. The distinction seemed important to him.

They hadn't always been friendly. There had been a time, before the big fight off LaFata Bank, when Rickli had joined his peers in mocking the man for his incompetence. But a harpoon through the knee, the Earthman's ministrations, and a year of mending sail had given him a new perspective. The Earthman was no longer sailing his native sea, was almost as helpless as one of the bottom creatures the divers brought up and threw on deck. In the Earthman's water, Rickli suspected, he would be more helpless than was the Earthman here.

The youngsters drifted down from the rigging. Rickli chuckled. Even at the winding of the shells he had known there wasn't enough breeze for the chaser to overhaul the brunwhal. He carefully inserted his tools into their brunwhalhide case, reached for his carved cane of spearfish ivory. The ship grew quiet around him. Soon there were no sounds but the soughing of the wind in the rigging, the sea whispering along the hull, and the creak of the vessel's planks and frame. Those sounds, in the deeps of the nightwatches, could leave a man terribly lonely. He added the thump of his cane as he hobbled aft.

There were times when Rickli cursed his leg for what it denied him, but as often he remembered that he was lucky to have it at all. Had it not been for the Shipwrecked Earthman, he might never have survived. As the augurs reminded them, when the grunling weren't running, tne blackfin were.

"Thomas?" he called down into the galley.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Here, Rickli." The man came to help him down the ladder.

Thomas Hakim, the Shipwrecked Earthman, was a small, dusky, dark-eyed man who had only recently developed the habit of wearing his hair long and tied back in a tail, though he still kept his beard carefully trimmed in a "space." It had taken years to break the habit of regular haircuts. On his ships, he had said, short hair had been mandatory.

The people of Quiet Sea all wore theirs long. Hair became rope and twine. On Quiet Sea all available resources were exploited.

"Looks like a peaceful crossing."

"Good. Good." The Earthman returned to his scaling knives. "A pity we can't make peace with the Fenaja."

It was, Rickli thought, one of the Earthman's favorite themes, one whose futility the man recognized. Natural competition made peace and cooperation impossible.

"The augurs say we'll do well here. No one's been to Pimental Bank for years. The sandweg should be tall."

The Earthman was ever a devil's advocate. "So? And what then? We build another ship. For what?"

Rickli chuckled, playing the game. "Why, so we can gather sandweg faster and build another ship sooner. Someday we'll have the biggest fleet on Quiet Sea."

"You already have it. One of those days you'll all listen to me, say the hell with it, and go sail off the edge of the world."

"That's what I like about you, Thomas. Always a cheery outlook."

"Christ!" But he smiled. The manner was a pose, Rickli had learned after having been thrown into Hakim's constant company by the Fenaja harpoon. "What were the horns about?" Though he had been with the fleet for years, Hakim still couldn't read signals.

"Brunwhal. They didn't get him."

"So it goes."

"When the grunling aren't running, the blackfin are. You need any help?"

"No. I'm almost done. Nothing till the salting starts. Checkers?"

The game had made the Shipwrecked Earthman famous across Quiet Sea. Before his falling-star arrival, all games had had to do with the sea. Checkers had caught on as a simple alternative to tradition. Hakim had tried teaching other games as well, especially chess, but the Children of the Sky had rejected them as too complicated. Their culture, Hakim had told Rickli, was too tight and changeless, with never-varying, simple goals, to accept unnecessary complexity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Children, though, enjoyed it when he told fortunes with a now ragged deck of tarot cards, though the augurs frowned at his treading on their heels. The Earthman thought that it was the pictures which seized their attention, not the patter. Pictures were almost unknown on Quiet Sea.

With Hakim's aid, Rickli returned to the maindeck. They set up the board atop a cargo hatch. People not otherwise occupied came over to watch. They were the best players on board.

"So tell me about Outside," Rickli said after a few moves. Hakim never lost his zest for reminiscing. Rickli didn't believe a tenth of what he said, nor did anyone else, but his tales were always entertaining. Also, they distracted him from his game.

"Did I tell you about the Iron Legion and the war with Richard Hawksblood in the Shadowline on Blackworld?" Hakim scanned his listeners, responded to their headshakes with: "It started centuries ago, before the Ulantonid War, but the high game, the endgame, was played out on Blackworld...."

The crowd grew till Dymon Tipsword, captain of *Rifkin's Dream,* came round growling at people off their watch stations. It was one of the Earthman's best stories. He got into it so deeply that Rickli beat him three straight.

Despite his crankiness and inability to master the simplest skills of seamanship, the Earthman was well liked. Aboard *Rifkin's Dream,* at least as a storyteller, he had become an honored institution.

"Pale water!" a lookout shouted from the maintop.

"The bank," Rickli said. All aboard relaxed slightly. The Fenaja shunned shallow, warm water.

Hakim gathered the checkers. "Even in paradise there's work for the sinful," he muttered. Rickli had become accustomed to such cryptic remarks, remarks Hakim seldom explained.

For the hundredth time Rickli wondered what twist of fate had brought Thomas to Quiet Sea. Though Hakim willingly chattered about himself, he refused to explain how he had come to be in a small ship, alone, near this long-forgotten world, nor would he tell what had led him to crash. His sole recorded remark on the affair was an observation that he had been lucky to set down near the fleet.

Rickli remembered the day well. He had been a rigging boy then, a maintop boy, when the morning sky had shown sudden, short-lived, unknown stars, and it had been during his masthead watch, later, that the sky had opened up and a shooting star, throwing off blinding-bright fragments of itself, had come roaring down with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thunders worse than those of any storm. The main body had hit the water beyond the horizon. A great column of steam had risen to mark the site.

The augurs, versed in the old lore, had turned the fleet that way, though the object had splashed down in Fenaja water.

Thousands of dead sea creatures had floated round a burned and twisted object wallowing deep in the waves. It had been huge, frighteningly so, and made of metal.... That had brought awe into the eyes of everyone who had not yet made the pilgrimage to Landing, where the remains of the Ship still lay.

When the strange object had cooled enough to be touched, every person who could had set about scavenging metal, much of which had proven unworkable later. On Quiet Sea, where there was no land at all and smelters consisted of charcoal hearths in the galleys of ships where handfuls of bottom nodes, recovered by lucky divers, were worked, that much refined metal seemed an unbelievable fortune.

Then they had broken through the outer skin and had found the unconscious man hanging in the curious strapping. He had been a dark, angry little man whose features had borne the stamp of intense concentration and fear. Though fearful, the augurs had brought him out and had done their best to mend his health. In the meantime, his vessel had been looted. Many of the Children still wore bits of glass and plastic for jewelry.

In the early days there had been a communications problem. Hakim hadn't spoken a language anything like their own, which had evolved through the centuries into one whose primary concern was the sea, its colors, deeps, moods, denizens, and the ships that sailed upon it. There were language difficulties even between the older fleets, though the augurs did their best to discourage diversion.

The Earthman's ancestors, and Rickli's, hadn't spoken the same language as contemporaries on Old Earth. And Hakim's people had followed a far different road since then.

But he had been a fast study. Perhaps a hint of why could be found in his tales of adventures on many worlds.

Though it had been obvious he would be a long time becoming productive, every ship in the fleet had vied for possession of the castaway. The augurs had spread the news that he had come from the semi-mythical world of their origin. The Children of the Sky had been hungry for news and knowledge.

The competition had become so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intense that the augurs, fearing violence, had ordered a lottery.

Rifkin's Dream had won.

And I had never been sorry, though at first the young people, Rickli included, had resented his presence because he had been granted so much unearned privilege.

But when he had come to understand the tongue and culture, he had done his best to pull his weight. Often over Dymon Tipsword's objections. The captain had sensed from the first that his new man would never make a sailor.

Thomas Hakim had never seen a sailing ship before Quiet Sea. He could only admire the complex relationships between the maze of booms, yards, rigging, masts, and sails, not begin to understand. The youngsters, who had grown up on the ships, sometimes thought him retarded.

Where and when, the Earthman did what he could. He had settled into the galley because cooking was what, it proved, he best understood.

Signals sounded over the water as the lead vessels entered the shallows. Orders shouted by dozens of captains carried over the quiet sea, sometimes resulting in confusion. Sails came in with whines and shrieks of tackle. In places the Pimental was so shallow that the larger vessels might run aground. The Bank was rich, but had to be exploited carefully. One dared not risk losing the vessel that was one's only home.

Quiet Sea was a calm, peaceful, relatively friendly world which supported its human population comfortably, in almost Polynesian ease, but there were pragmatic realities to be faced even in Eden. Worst was the lack of living space. The ships were all they had, were difficult to build for lack of land, and were always populated to their supportive limits. Humanity being fecund, stringent measures were required to control population.

In Rickli's fleet this took its simplest form. Crews were segregated by sex. Male children were allowed to remain with their mothers only during their first two years. In other fleets other methods, often harsher methods, were employed, including drowning of unwanted newborns, the old and halt. No technology of contraception existed.

The sexual mores of the society had been hard on the Shipwrecked Earthman. His great goal, he had once told Rickli, was to make it possible to mate without breeding. He had shown Manlove one of his ideas, a sheath of finest grunling gut carefully scraped and cured. Rickli had understood the technical aspect, but not the emotional. He had simply remarked that the material could be put to better use as sausage casing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The fleet began to disperse. Some, like *Rifkin's Dream*, would seine. Chasers would range out in search of brunwhal, which hugged the food-rich banks. Others would send divers below for shellfish, useful bottom plants, sand, and stone, the latter for potential ore, ballast use, and transport to the centuries-old project to create, at Landing, what Quiet Sea lacked naturally: dry land. Specialized vessels would harvest sandweg, a huge bottom plant that could be cut into lumber. The stands were rich on Pimental, often rising five meters above sea level.

Hakim and Rickli, with everyone else not otherwise occupied, helped clean and salt the catch.

"Mixed catch," said Rickli, puzzled, dragging a thrashing blackfin from a lively pile and stilling it with one quick jab of the butt of his knife.

Hakin took a smaller, more easily cleaned grunling. "Not a good sign," he agreed. When the species mixed in the shallows, it was because the blackfin felt threatened by something in the deeps. Blackfin preferred the cooler, deeper waters on the faces of the banks. The grunling preferred the warmer shallows. "Fenaja?"

"Probably not. There would've been some sign."

Dymon Tipsword, too, was concerned. He had a caution pennant bent to a halyard and run to the maintruck. Here and there, similar pennons ran to other mains.

"Whatever, we'll find out first," said Rickli. *Rifkin's Dream* was seining on the extreme left of the fleet, nearest the deep water.

"Probably just the temblor last night."

"Maybe." But a feeling of wrongness had begun growing on Rickli. Why hadn't there been any Fenaja sign during the crossing? They didn't attack often, but when ships entered their waters they always came up to watch, their ugly, whiskered snouts trailing Vs on the surface as they dared the humans to start something. Sometimes they would lift their dun, scaly foreparts from the waves and croak insults learned from other men. But as long as there were no bone-tipped harpoons in sight, their intentions remained peaceful. Their attacks, generally, came in waters where one of their occasional, sudden, inexplicable population explosions had left the blackfin schools depleted.

The winchmen hauled a bulging net aboard, scattering the sand-covered deck with flopping fish. The youngsters, wearing brunwhal-skin chaps and gloves, began heaving the smallest and females over the side. Neither grunling nor blackfin had dangerous teeth, but their scales could rasp the skin off a man with one caress. Dried black-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fin hide was used to sand the decks. During fishing those decks were covered two centimeters deep with sand from ballast meant to absorb spilled blood and entrails.

"Uhn!" Hakim grunted. "There's your Fenaja."

Rickli stood, ignoring the sudden sharp pain in his knee. "Part of one." He hobbled forward, helped others pull the mangled corpse from the pile of fish. "Dymon!"

Tipsword came down from the helm, spent a long minute staring at the remains. "All right. Back to work. We've got a hold to fill. You three, put it back over the side. Its people will be looking for it." As activity resumed, the captain stalked back to his station. A new set of pennons ran to the main. The ship's armorer began making the round of battle stations, setting out harpoons, axes, swords.

Rickli resumed his seat, said nothing for a long time.

"What is it?" Hakim asked.

"Half the body had been eaten. It still had a broken harpoon in its hand."

Hand was a misnomer. From the Fenaja's forward end, near what might pass for shoulders were it accustomed to going upright, a specialized pair of tentacles grew; the ends of these had modified into three finger-length sub-tentacles. The quasi-intelligent creatures used them as a man used hands.

"Meaning he maybe died fighting something that was eating him?"

"Uhm." Naturally enough, the monsters of the legends and folklore of the Children of the Sky were all creatures from the deep and, though Hakim had never encountered a man who had seen one, the sea people believed in their existence as devoutly as their ancestors had believed in dragons and trolls.

The only known enemies of the Fenaja were human. But the Children of the Sky had little real knowledge of what lived at the bottom of the deeps. Their interest was the banks, an ecological cycle into which their ancestors had inserted themselves.

The seining, cleaning, and salting went on, though wary eyes kept glancing toward deep water. Yet the crew trusted Tipsword's judgment. Had he believed real danger existed, he would have had the nets hauled in and stored.

The tension bothered the Earthman. "Think I'll go get Esmeralda," he said, putting his knife aside.

Rickli nodded, reached for another blackfin. The thing the Earthman called Esmeralda had been one of the few possessions he had reclaimed after the looting of his ship. To Rickli it looked like an ornate mutation of a shipfitter's mallet, except that Hakim always

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

handled it backwards. Manlove suspected it was some sort of Outside talisman. Hakim brought it out each time *Rifkin's Dream* sailed into danger, but Rickli had yet to see the man do anything with it.

Just as Thomas returned, flying fish began skipping across the sea. Tipsword judged their numbers and the length of their jumps, shouted, "Ship the nets! Forget the fish! Bring them in!"

It wasn't necessary to tell the cleaners and salters to clear the decks. Every man able began pitching fish over the side. New signals rose to the main; hornmen stood by.

The sea began boiling two hundred meters off the port bow.

"Cut it!" Tipsword thundered at the netmen. "Now! Move it!" Men shuddered. A good seine costs hundreds of man-hours to make. But, if they were lucky, they could come about and recover it later. Bladders made of brunwhal stomachs would keep it afloat. Someone began wielding an ax. The trouble horns screamed across the water. Nearby ships became furious with activity.

"Hard right rudder!" Tipsword ordered. "Stand by to shift sail."

The rigging boys were already aloft.

Rifkin's Dream was the long-dead shipbuilder Rifkin's attempt to combine the best of two types of rigging in one of the fleet's largest vessels. She was square-rigged on her forward and topmainmasts, schooner-rigged on her main and mizzen. Sharp course changes could result in mass confusion.

There was little of that this time. Everyone was too frightened to make a mistake.

"Oh!" said Rickli. Nothing else would come.

"Jesus," said the Shipwrecked Earthman, softly. "What the hell is it?"

"Grossfenaja. The deepdark-devil."

Rifkin's Dream slowly heeled over as her rudder took hold and she took the wind on her beam. Her stern slid sideways toward the thing rising from the deep. The nearest seining ship winded its own horns and cut its net lines too.

A shout from the masthead directed their attention forward. Half a kilometer ahead, another one was rising. Then another, off the port quarter.

"Never heard of anything like this!" Rickli shouted. The nearest beast was still surfacing, more and more tentacles slapping water, some reaching for *Rifkin's Dream.* Dymon Tipsword shouted for the younger boys to get below.

"Must have been the earthquake," Hakim muttered. "Christ! Another one."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The main body of the nearest broke water. It was over sixty meters long and serpentine, like a fat Midgard serpent whose tail had turned into a kraken. The head was at the end opposite the main mass of tentacles, with just two five-meter Fenaja-type limbs nearby.

Regaining his composure, Rickli said, "Any of the other old monsters I would've believed, but this...."

The creature writhed in an effort to direct its head toward the ship, but it seemed Tipsword had acted in time and the vessel would slip away.

"Sandweg!" the forward lookout cried. A moment later he hurtled into the sea as the vessel plowed into a dense young stand, the tops of which hadn't yet broken water. The bows rose high, *Rifkin's Dream* shuddered, then lurched forward as her momentum snapped or uprooted the plants.

But she hadn't enough way on to carry her through. Her stern and rudder hung up. In moments she was dead in the water.

"Battle stations!" Tipsword bellowed. "You boys below, see if she's sprung any leaks. Spearsong, get a boat over. Winchmen, stand by to kedge her. Thomas, get coals from the galley."

Hakim ran. Rickli, trying to stay out of the way, wondered how their puny weapons, even fire, could stave off the predator. He glanced at the rest of the fleet. No help there. Panic and confusion were the supreme admirals of the moment. And running for shallower water seemed no real solution. The creature that had surfaced immediately ahead was already dragging itself through water just four meters deep. Speed seemed the only escape.

He noted a racked harpoon with an ornate grip of brunwhal ivory. His own, that the crew had given him when he had been Left Hand Sea Terror, best chaser spritman in the fleet. He hobbled over and exchanged it for his cane. There was comfort in the familiar grip. He would die with his old companion in hand.

The decks and tops seemed utter chaos, yet the frenetic activity had its purposes. But for the thing bearing down, it might have been the last moment before an ordinary Fenaja fight. There had been more panic and confusion at LaFata. Rickli stayed out of the way, gradually drifted forward.

The sword, ax, and harpoon men all seemed so young, just boys. Where were the longbeards, the grizzled old men who had manned the rail at LaFata? Dead, of course. Still there, consigned to the deep. Not many had been as lucky as he. Half this crew had transferred aboard after that battle.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Jesus," he murmured, borrowing from the Shipwrecked Earthman. The thing's head was scarred with a mouth large enough to take a man or Fenaja at a gulp.

Twenty meters from *Dream*, it plunged beneath the water, torpedoing into the sandweg wrack left by the ship's passage. Rickli shouted a warning to Spearsong, but too late. The head rose and destroyed the longboat with a single snap of huge jaws. The foretentacles snatched men from the water.

The thing's rear smashed into the port side. The vessel jumped, shook, groaned in protest. Everyone went tumbling. Rigging boys rained from above, smashing into deck or sea with terrified screams. Rickli lost the harpoon.

Tipsword thunderously ordered everyone back to the rail. Then a tentacle whipped over and snatched him away from the wheel. He went over the side, into the sea, hacking with a rare metal sword.

Though they numbered only twenty and were no thicker than a man's arm, the monster's rear tentacles seemed to fall in a deadly rain. Against them harpoons were useless. The sword and ax men managed to damage a few, but the beast seemed oblivious to pain. Its head reared high to starboard and observed critically while its tail worked murder to port.

Dead men speckled the sea. Tentacles began reaching through hatches and snaking out the boys below. Terrified, pathetic screams echoed below decks.

Rickli suddenly understood that they were fighting the wrong end. Its normal prey probably never realized that. He tried to tell someone, but with Dymon gone there was no one to make them listen. He glanced to starboard. The creature was casually nibbling on a boatman. He bent, picked up a harpoon, cast it.

His knee betrayed him. He collapsed on bloody sand, almost cried when the harpoon whispered past the thing's trunk, a meter below his target. He had to get closer.

It had to be out the bowsprit. From nowhere else could he be certain of being close enough to overcome his knee. He grabbed another harpoon and started.

There wasn't much thought in the journey, that seemed an endless pilgrimage to keep a rendezvous with death. There was pain such as he hadn't known since the Fenaja harpoon had struck. Tentacles whipped about with Rickli Manlove seemingly their special target. One seized him round the bad knee, pulled and squeezed, but fate placed a level-headed axman nearby. He went on, crawling, dragging the re-injured leg. Something had gone in the knee. He had heard and felt it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Three meters out the bowsprit, he collapsed, unable to go on.

Salt spray stung his eyes. Or was it tears? Failed again.... He wasn't sure where he was, on a chaser racing after the humping brown back of a brunwhal, or lying half-dead after LaFata.... His will returned. Then his strength. Just enough. He made it to the leadsman's platform, dragged himself upright, gripped his harpoon, threw.

And sagged in defeat. Low again. It buried itself deep, but a meter below the huge yellow eye for which he had aimed.

"Rickli! Rickli Manlove!" The Earthman's curious, harshly accented voice seemed to come from years and kilometers away. Slowly, he turned.

The Earthman stood at the foot of the bowsprit, harpoon in one hand, his talisman in the other. A tentacle had him round the waist.

Rickli reached a futile hand....

The Earthman put the harpoon in the air. It slapped his palm.

He felt familiar ivory, the old, comfortable grip of his high years.

He turned. He aimed. He cast.

He collapsed, but only after he had seen his old companion buried grip-deep in the yellow eye.

Rickli lay unconscious for days. He came round to find *Rifkin's Dream*, with help from other ships, trying to keep afloat during repairs to her hull and rigging. Some vessels worked the beast's remains. Masts crowded the battle site. Through them he could see a similar cluster in the distance.

The Shipwrecked Earthman lay beside him, drugged, his waist a mass of ripped skin and ugly bruises. His guts must have been churned good. His talisman remained gripped in his left hand.

"Good afternoon, Captain."

"Ilyana Wildhaber. What're you doing here?"

"Keeping this tub off the bottom." She was captain of *Replete*, a repair and stores vessel. "It's a jinx."

"Have Weatherhead change our station."

"There'll be changes. This made LaFata look like a christening party."

"Tell me."

"There were six of them. Several ships weren't as lucky as *Dream*. Three were dragged into the deep. Six more went down in the shallows. Two we'll refloat. Most everyone got involved."

"Guess there'll be work for a crippled sailmaker, then." Rickli's greatest fear was that the crew would vote him supernumerary, a fear that had begun while the Fenaja harpoon still quivered in his knee. No such vote had been taken in living memory, even against in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

corrigibles, but Rickli felt he was a child of fate. A malevolent fate.

"Didn't you hear? You're captain now."

"No."

"Yes. They voted. You'll replace Dymon. If you live."

Rickli at last found the nerve to look down. "A one-legged man?"

She shrugged. "Got to go. You lie still, don't get it infected. They'd take it off at the neck next time."

Rickli stared at the battered masts and rigging, pondering the odd course of fate. A harpoon man in good condition grew old in his job, usually perishing when age tricked him into fatal error. But as a sailmaker who could fight, he had with one cast of a harpoon won the hearts of a crew.

Such as it might be. His elevation might be a mockery. Losses had been heavy when he had made his throw.

Rifkin's Dream did not weigh anchor for six weeks and then moved only a kilometer. Rickli and the Earthman were both off their backs but not in good health. Hakim couldn't handle solid food.

Rickli drilled his crew mercilessly, trying to meld a scattering of veterans and dozens of transfers into a new ship's company.

"What do you think?" he asked the Earthman one day.

"They'll cope. They always do. Why worry?"

"I want them to look sharp. We're going on pilgrimage."

"Landing?" The Shipwrecked Earthman had never visited the site of Man's first touchdown on Quiet Sea. During his tenure individual ships or squadrons had felt the need and made the hadj, but *Rifkin's Dream* had sailed on, remaining with the fleet as it crawled from bank to bank. It had been twenty-five years since the vessel had gone.

"The whole fleet. We need the luck. Two disasters in one year.... It's time."

Landing's special significance hadn't attained religious standing, but some superstition had attached itself, encouraged by the augurs. To maintain their birthluck, all Children of the Sky were encouraged to visit the Ship every few years.

The reason, the Earthman had suggested, was so the augurs at the Ship could gather information from scattered sources, collate it, and disseminate it again.

The Earthman, Rickli reflected, had a lot of strange ideas about the Children of the Sky. He supposed that was the alien viewpoint. Whatever, Thomas was eager to reach Landing.

If anything, the encounter with Grossfenaja had ripened and mellowed their relationship. The Earthman now shared more of his alien thoughts.

While crossing the Finneran

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bank, the traditional boundary between seas well-known and the frontier waters the fleet generally cruised, just a week's fast sail from Landing, Rickli said, "Thomas, you've never told us why you're here. Something must've brought you."

The sun had set an hour before. The bright jewels of the galaxy winked down as they began their migration toward dawn. *Rifkin's Dream* had settled into the long, lonely silence of night, whispering and creaking to herself, but telling few stories to listening ears. The passage of ships excited bioluminescent plankton in the shallows, scrawling pale stripes across the quiet sea. Hakim stared at the stars, at the constellation the sea people called the Spiderfish, for a long time.

"I don't know, Rickli," he said at last. "Why *does* a man leave home? I thought I knew then. Somehow, from here, it doesn't seem all that important."

"Was it so wicked a thing?" Rickli knew he had touched a nerve with the initial question. When Thomas stayed awake to watch the Spiderfish, he was feeling homesick. That much Rickli knew for sure about the Earthman.

Hakim frowned to him, his expression barely visible in the starlight. Afraid he had overstepped, Rickli turned to survey the running lights of nearby ships. Night sailing could be tricky.

"Some thought so. You wouldn't comprehend. The survival imperatives are different. Here, you all live in the same environment and culture." He pointed upward. "There's a fleet, the greatest of them all. Every ship is as far from its neighbor as we are from any of them. Some are big, some small, some strong, some weak. Like the fishes of the sea. Here, there're warm shallows where the living is easy and the fish get along, then the cold deeps, and in them things that get hungry, that sometimes surface, like Grossfenaja...."

Rickli wasn't sure he followed, unless the Earthman meant that some of his people preyed on others. "You mean like the pirate ship in the Saga of Wilga Stonecipher?"

"Eh? Oh. Yes, I suppose so. In any case, men Outside sometimes go after other men the way chasers pursue brunwhal."

He went silent, continued staring at the Spiderfish.

Rickli knew he had pushed as far as he dared, yet couldn't resist asking, "Would you go back now? If you had the chance?"

Hakim studied him a moment, looked back to the sky, said nothing. Rickli shrugged, surveyed the fleet again.

Thomas had been thinking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about it, he knew. The man couldn't help it, no more than he could help thinking about serving in chasers, despite LaFata. The Earthman was crippled too. It just wasn't anything as obvious as a missing leg. Perhaps it could be called a broken heartline home.

Landing, for those who had never seen it, appeared on the horizon as the most outstanding anomaly of the sea, a great hump rising from the water like the back of some mythologically huge brunwhal.

"That's the Ship," Rickli told the Shipwrecked Earthman, when the thing finally became visible from helm level. Excited crewmen had been scampering up and down the rigging for hours. But not Hakim. He had a positive terror of heights.

Strange, for a man who flew between the stars.

"Jesus, how'd they bring her down in one piece?"

"They didn't, really." Rickli scanned the fleet. By now, every vessel had hoisted at least one black sail. Some looked like the dark birds of death Hakim had called them. The chaser crews were getting impatient, waiting for Weatherhead's permission to begin their race to the ancient wreck. "That's why we're still here."

The vessel had been built at the close of Old Earth's Twenty-second Century, equipped with crude hyper generators, to take out certain political favorites before an anticipated collapse of civilization. Almost two kilometers long, she had never been meant to enter atmosphere. Rickli was unsure of the circumstances that had brought her to, and had forced her landing upon, Quiet Sea. Only the augurs knew. He cared only that it had been managed and that his ancestors had survived.

Thomas cared, mostly from curiosity, but could get no more from Rickli.

"Ask the augurs when we get there," Manlove kept telling him. "They'll spend a month talking to anyone willing to listen."

He thought he understood Thomas's interest. The Ship was the nearest a connection Outside as existed on Quiet Sea. A hopeless, centuries-out-of-date connection, but certainly something more concrete than shared specieshood.

Outsiders, judging by Hakim, set great store by artifacts and possessions. The Earthman still, at times, mourned some small item lost when his ship had been looted.

Rickli had spread the word among the captains, but little had turned up. Everything convertible had long since been made into something useful.

Weatherhead released the chasers. With a strong following breeze

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they were soon dwindling in their race to the hump.

"You really miss it that much?" the Earthman asked.

Rickli smiled. "It shows? I think it's just not being able. It was my life, you know."

"I understand." Thomas glanced at the sky. "Those old-timers had guts. People out there nowadays, in their shoes, would just give up."

"It was a chosen crew. They knew they couldn't go back before they started."

"A definite advantage. None of us can, but few of us realize it." After a pause: "You know, I think what I miss most, more than land, is birds. They were always a symbol of freedom." His expression became faraway. Rickli reached out and, for an instant, let his hand rest lightly on the Earthman's shoulder.

Thomas had told him a dozen times that his fellows would not be coming to rescue him. They had had no idea where to look.

It was almost dark when *Rifkin's Dream* dropped her stone anchors. In the morning she would move to one of the stone quays whiskering the dry land the Children of the Sky had built around their Ship.

"Seems to me," said the Earthman, gazing at the island that had taken centuries to create, "that it would've been easier to poulder. More land for less fill."

Rickli had to have it explained. Thomas told him about dikes and sub-sea-level land recovery.

"Suggest it to the augurs. They might be interested."

"I'm not sure I want to go anymore." Hakim nervously caressed his talisman. Since his narrow escape, he had kept it with him always.

Rickli smiled. Of course he would go, just as he himself would visit a chaser if invited. Every man tried to mend his heartlines.

"They've made a lot of headway since I was here last," Rickli said the following morning, as *Rifkin's Dream* warped in to a low stone pier. "They've doubled the land area. They didn't used to work that hard at it."

The Earthman observed without comment. Several vessels were already off-loading ballast to be added to the fill. The Ship itself was completely surrounded. Curious sea people were looking it over, some lining up at an open hatchway for an interior tour.

"Rickli, it sounds defeatist, but why bother? You seem to have adapted."

"We did without for centuries. It was just a dream thing. Ships would come on pilgrimage and everyone would bring a stone as a symbolic gift. They piled up. Then the augurs built a little sawmill on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the pile. It made cutting sandweg so much easier that people started thinking it might be handy to have an island just for that. So they started bringing bigger loads of stone. Didn't push it, though, because they were used to doing things the old way. Then the augurs built a bigger sawmill, that handled about half the sandweg used in the fleets, and a smelter where they turned out almost a tonne of metal a month."

He took out the knife that, with the captaincy, he had inherited from Dymon Tipsword. "This's a genuine Wintermantel. Better than anything they make here, but it took the man a month, sometimes, to make one blade."

Hakim laughed sourly. "The glories of industrialization."

"It's so bad? Look there. Places where they can take a ship out of the water for repairs. And ways where they can build a ship in a tenth the time it takes at sea, with a quarter of the men."

"No. I'm a cynic. What're those buildings down there? Beyond the drydocks and shipyard."

"I don't know. They're new. Must be important, though. That's a lot of sandweg to hold out of ship construction."

"Uhm. Curious."

It wasn't till later that Rickli realized he had missed the specific that had caught the Earthman's eye. The buildings had glass windows. Hundreds of them, especially on top.

Partial starts on other buildings lay scattered over the manmade island. The augurs seemed to have a big program in mind. Rickli frowned. Providing the materials cost the fleets time and materials they could use themselves. He didn't understand. Unless there were rewards worth the cost, as with the sawmills and smelters.

Thomas didn't know what he wanted. Sometimes he would start for the pier, then would pace, then would return to wait till Rickli had fulfilled his duties. Then he would grow impatient again, only to repeat the cycle.

At last Rickli felt able to go. He left the ship to the duty section and, with Thomas's help, slowly advanced up the pier. He felt uncomfortable, naked, defenseless, so wide had the world expanded. And he felt dizzy. For the first time in a decade he was on footing that did not sway and roll with the restlessness of the sea.

"This isn't going to cut it," said Thomas. "I'm going to make those crutches."

They had argued about it before. Rickli didn't want them. But practicality began to alter his mindset.

"Where're you going?" he asked. Hakim was turning right,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away from the rusty mountain of the Ship.

"I want to look at something."

But they never reached the windowed buildings. Rickli's leg bothered him too much. At his request they paused to rest in the shade of an oddly designed hull in the last stages of construction.

The Earthman studied it, finally asked, "How much glass do they make here, Rickli?"

He shrugged. "Things have changed. Used to be just a little, from bottom sand, for special bottles and trinkets."

"Hand-blown?" Thomas ran his fingers over the smooth seamless hull.

"Never saw it done any other way." He, too, studied the strange vessel. So much metal had gone into its construction. Surely the augurs wouldn't be so wasteful. "Is something wrong?"

"I don't know. This isn't my native sea. But there's something odd here, something that makes me feel the way I did just before the Grossfenaja surfaced." He caressed his talisman, which protruded from the waistband of his trousers.

Perhaps because he was in a suggestable mood, or because he was uncomfortable ashore, Rickli began to feel it too. "Let's go back to the ship. You make those crutches, and we'll poke around later."

"Crutches? Oh, yes." He helped Rickli up, saying, "Maybe you should think about a wooden leg."

"A what?"

By way of explanation, Thomas told him a decidedly fishy tale about an ancient seaman named Long John Silver. The idea intrigued Rickli. Though the notion wasn't unique, it hadn't occurred to him in relation to himself. He had encountered few men who'd had to cope with being an amputee. The state of medicine was such that few men ever survived such operations.

Returning, they encountered acquaintances from *Replete,* who, in good humor, offered to carry Rickli back to *Rifkin's Dream,* although the ship was out of their way. It seemed they hoped his luck would rub off. Though it hurt his pride, he accepted. His remaining leg hurt more.

As they moved down the pier, Hakim asked one of the women, "May I see your knife?" A shiny new fishknife protruded from her waistband.

Grinning, "Sure. The augurs are trading them for sandweg." Less cheerfully: "After Pimental, we're overstocked."

Rickli thought the Earthman would never stop turning the blade, examining its grip, thumbing its edge. Finally: "Rickli, can I see yours?"

The sailors, now puzzled, re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leased him so he could hand Thomas the knife. It was one of only a dozen iron blades to be found aboard *Rifkin's Dream*. "Forged by Aulgur Wintermantel himself," he told the others. The smith, though a century dead, was still a legend.

The Earthman placed Rickli's knife-back down on pier stone, suddenly swung the other so that their edges met sharply.

"Thomas!"

Ilyana's women growled angrily.

Hakim held the blades up for all to see. Rickli's had been deeply notched, the other nicked imperceptibly.

"A genuine Wintermantel?" the new blade's owner asked, her anger fading as she saw the quality of her knife. "Really?"

"Yes." Rickli was dumfounded. His edge should have damaged the other.

As the sailors drifted away, talking excitedly of further trades, Hakim said, "You may get an answer to the question you asked the other night." He didn't apologize for damaging the Wintermantel. He seemed terribly upset.

Rickli let it ride till they were comfortably back aboard, observing ship and Ship from the captain's station. The Earthman stared into the distance and caressed his talisman.

"What is it, Thomas? What's wrong?"

"I'm not sure. The knife. The finish on that hull. The glass-topped buildings. But especially the knife."

"Why? It was a good one."

"Exactly. Too good, Rickli. I don't care what the augurs have been doing, they couldn't have made that knife. That was a machined blade, an Outside blade. The question is, did it come with the Ship?" After a glance toward the strange buildings, "I'm afraid of the answer."

Rickli made the intuitive leap. "You think the augurs are in touch with your people?"

"Not mine, Rickli. Not mine."

"Ah, so. The enemy. Your Fenaja."

Hakim took the talisman from his waistband, peered down its long axis.

"Grossfenaja." One word. But still he wouldn't elaborate.

"Your enemies are mine. Twice you've honored my life."

"So it goes," Hakim murmured to himself, the ancient acceptance of fate characteristic of the Children of the Sky. "No. They're merciless. They'd destroy you all if I dragged you in. If they're really here."

Now Rickli said, "So it goes. If they're that kind of people, then they *should* be enemies."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Stay out of it, Rickli. Stay out. I'll try to avoid them. Yes. That's best. If they don't know I'm here, they won't bother anybody. I'll just stay aboard till you put to sea again. I'll decide what to do when you're ready to cast off."

But the wills of Fate and the Shipwrecked Earthman weren't in concert. Shortly, Rickli said, "What's this?" indicating a group coming down the pier. "Ship augurs."

A youth ran up, announced, "Augurs Blackcraft and Homewood request permission to board, sir."

"Granted." To Thomas, "The top people. Must've heard about the Grossfenaja."

"Uhm." Hakim was not convinced.

The augurs were old, and some disabled. The lore mastery was reserved to those no longer able to cope with the sea. Though the whole party boarded, only Blackcraft and Homewood, male and female, approached the captain's station. Both eyed the Earthman.

"Greetings," said Homewood, her voice surprisingly youthful. "It's been long since Landing was honored by *Rifkin's Dream.*"

"And longer since *Dream* was graced by the presence of an elder augur." Rickli decided he should try to put them on the defensive.

Their eyes kept drifting to Thomas.

"We hear some strange things have befallen in the interim." Blackcraft seemed strangely wary. "The years drift past, the ships come in, and sailors tell their tales. Some were hard to credit."

"No doubt. The young embellish with drama. A Saga grows from ordinary events."

"So it goes."

"Yet these tales seemed no rigging boy's daydream." said Homewood, looking directly at the Earthman.

"How can we judge the truth of sea stories?"

"Never mind the fencing, Rickli," said Hakim. To the augurs: "What do you want?"

"You're the Shipwrecked Earthman?"

"What do you want?"

"Are you the man called Thomas Hakim?"

"What do you want?"

"You must come with us."

"No," said Rickli. "Thomas is restricted to ship."

They were growing irritated. Blackcraft grumbled, "Captain, these are matters beyond you. And I remind you, you're no longer at sea."

"An oversight that can be corrected with a word."

"Tell your masters," said the Earthman, "that if they want me, they'll have to come see me themselves."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Masters?"

"The Outsiders. The Sangaree. The people who sent you here. The people who have been giving you Outside goods in return for use of Landing. You probably think they've done well by you. But you've been cheated. Terribly. You don't know them, don't know what they are. Tell them that if they want Thomas Hakim, they'll have to meet him before the Children of the Sky. You'll learn."

They could see Thomas was immovable. Homewood bowed slightly. "So it goes." She and Blackwood rejoined their deputation. Soon one of the lesser augurs was hurrying up the pier.

"Ah." The Earthman chuckled nervously. "I was right. But I was only guessing."

"What's it all about, Thomas?" Rickli asked.

"My enemies are here. But they're not sure who I am." After a time: "You should have stayed out of it."

Rickli shrugged. "You're my friend. You were my right hand at Pimental." From the captain's equipment rack he took a shell-horn. "You're one of our own now." He blew recall.

Stunned silence settled over Landing. Then sea people were everywhere, running. Before the Earthman could protest, Rickli had had danger pennons run to the main and had instructed the armorer to fill the weapons racks. By ones, twos, and threes, crewmen came running aboard, battering the augurs in their haste to reach their stations.

"You're a fool, Rickli Manlove. This isn't your fight." But the Earthman wore a smile.

"Maybe. Stay out of the way till I get muster."

Other vessels, too, began readying weapons and sail. The chaos on Landing diminished as crews found their ways to their ships.

Through the confusion came a wedge of five tall men in outlandish clothing. Rickli stared. They were heavier than his people, more muscular. Even from a distance he could see that there was no humor in their faces.

"These are your enemies?" he asked.

"Some of them. Watch the little one. The one who seems the least. He's their leader, Gaab w'Telle. There're blood debts between us. I'll keep out of sight." He slipped down into the galley.

Rickli called his armorer.

The five came aboard as if they owned *Rifkin's Dream*. Their not having asked permission aggravated Rickli's predisposition to dislike them. The light one spoke with Homewood and Blackcraft, then came aft. All five had hard, dark eyes. Fenaja eyes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Where is he?" Telle asked. He glanced speculatively at Rickli's stump.

Quiet as death, with an expression as grim, Thomas slipped from the galley, his talisman in hand. He nodded.

"Right behind you," Rickli replied.

They turned. The leader went pale. "You!"

"Of course. I take some killing. How's the universe been treating you, Telle? Not well, I hope."

"But...."

"As a writer once said, the reports of my death were exaggerated. You didn't send enough shooters."

So, thought Rickli, this was the man who had tried to kill Thomas. He signaled his armorer. Crewmen began selecting weapons.

Men of Quiet Sea almost never used weapons against one another. Rickli doubted his men could now. But maybe the Outsiders wouldn't recognize the bluff.

"I'll make sure this time. This's one operation you're not going to wreck." He didn't seem impressed by the martial display.

Thomas pointed his talisman.

The leader laughed. "Bluffing with a dead lasepistol, von Rhor? Six years old? Gotta. Take him."

One man took one step.

There was a dazzling flash. The man fell, steam twisting from a small black hole in his back.

Pandemonium. Crewmen scattered. The augurs fled to the bows. The tableau of confrontation remained a tense pocket of false calm amidst the confusion.

Telle and his men seemed stricken. And Thomas, too, as though he could neither believe what he had done nor that his weapon had actually functioned.

Rickli took his ivory-gripped harpoon from the captain's equipment rack. A great calm, like that of the last moment before the cast from a racing chaser's sprit, descended upon him. The sight of one man killing another had not shaken him as much as he thought it should. Maybe he would react later, after the tension had passed.

"Six years, Telle. Six years I've sailed the quiet sea, without a hope, yet cherishing this thing. My only regret had been that you were still alive, that I'd failed and you were still peddling your death dust.

"I don't expect to live through this. I tried to avoid it because it'll cost these good people. The augurs think you're benefactors; yet you're raising the drug right in their front yard. When I die, you'll carry the candle to light my way into Hell."

"Spoken like a true hero," Telle sneered. But most of his arrogance had faded.

"Rickli," said the Earthman. "A favor."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Anything, Thomas."

"Have them stripped. Move the shooters forward."

"Thomas?" Telle asked. "What happened to Nicholas von Rhor?"

"Don't mean anything here, Telle. And just between us, that's not it either." The bodyguards moved away. "Actually, it's Soren Deatherage."

"The Hell Stars!"

"Yes."

Rickli did not understand the exchange, but the winds of hatred blowing between the men made it clear they had hurt one another deeply and often. Maybe Thomas would explain later. But he doubted it. He had learned more about Hakim in the past ten minutes than in all the years before.

Thomas handed his talisman to the armorer, began shedding his own clothing.

Rickli had never seen Thomas unclothed. Now he frowned. The Earthman was older than he had suspected. His body hair was heavily salted with grey.

"In the fleets we settle personal disputes by wrestling," said Hakim. "Man to man, Telle. I'll be thinking about what you did to my wife."

A smile ghosted across Telle's thin lips. "Then I'll remember Karamar and the Hell Stars." With a swiftness that stunned Rickli, he attacked.

Thomas was lighter, shorter. All the disadvantages seemed his. Yet he held his own.

He moved as suddenly as Telle, throwing an open-handed finger punch Rickli was unable to follow. Telle blocked with a forearm as he whipped past, flicked a kick at Hakim's groin. Thomas took it on his thigh, unleashed a kick of his own that connected with the back of Telle's pivotal knee as he turned. Telle went down. As he did, he caught Thomas's foot and dragged the smaller man with him. They rolled across the deck, kneeing, gouging, biting, then broke, bounced up, and squared off. They traded feints and counterfeints almost too subtle for Rickli to follow.

This, he thought, was another new facet of Hakim. The style of fighting was quick and deadly. He was glad Thomas hadn't lost his temper under the heavy needling of his first few years aboard. He might not be able to work ship, but he could kill.

The fighters came together in a flurry of punches and kicks. Then Hakim was on the deck, bleeding from one cheek. Telle circled him warily while Thomas awaited a chance to regain his feet.

Thomas seemed less practiced and clearly had less stamina than his opponent. Rickli worried.

Hakim suddenly seemed to do three things at once, reversing their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

positions. Now he circled cautiously while Telle awaited a chance to rise.

It went on and on, time weighing ever more heavily on the Earthman. He was getting slower. Telle began moving with more confidence.

The larger man suddenly moved in, forcing a contest of strength. For long minutes the two strained in one another's grasp; then there was a loud crack. Thomas gasped. His left arm went slack. Telle stepped back with a look of satisfaction — and Thomas loosed a kick that destroyed his knee as thoroughly as the Fenaja harpoon had destroyed Rickli's.

Telle went down with an expression of pained surprise.

Holding his broken arm with his good hand, Thomas circled, waiting to kick again.

Telle seized an ax from a nearby weapons rack, threw. Thomas dodged, but not fast enough. The blade opened a gash on the outside of his left thigh. He fell, his blood staining the deck. He tried to rise, groaned, fell back, dragged himself to the mizzenmast, placed his back to it.

Telle pulled a sword from the rack, crawled toward the Earthman.

"Thomas!" Thomas Hakim!" The Shipwrecked Earthman looked Rickli's way. Manlove threw the ivory-gripped harpoon.

It slapped Thomas's hand. He held on.

Crossing the Finneran Bank by night again, Rickli Manlove peered at the Spiderfish. Unnatural stars had been blooming there since before sundown. Thomas's people had come searching for their enemies. Hakim's message, sent on Telle's Landing equipment, had gotten through.

Quiet Sea would never be the same.

Rickli thought of Hakim's talisman, of the battle, and of Outside as Thomas had described it before *Rifkin's Dream* had departed Landing. He wondered if, knowing of those things, the augurs would have pulled the Earthman from the sea six years ago.

Too late now.

"So it goes," he murmured, surveying the running lights of the fleet. "When the grunling aren't running, the blackfin are."

Changes due or no, there was work to be done. Fish to be caught, sandweg to be harvested, Fenaja to be fought, stone to be transported to Landing. He had enough to concern him here on the quiet sea.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In which banker/supernaturalist Willy Newbury rents a house in the French West Indies, a house furnished with voodoo warnings, deadly snakes and ghosts.

The Yellow Man

by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

The yellow man said, "And what, Monsieur, are you doing, moving into my house?"

I had rented the station wagon in Fort-de-France and driven out to the place I had taken. I, my wife, and three children were carrying suitcases, dress bags, cameras, and other gear into the house when this man appeared in the driveway.

Something told me at once that he spelled trouble. He was about of my height, but slender, with a yellow-tan skin and curly rather than kinky hair. Before such people became hypersensitive about the term, we used to call them mulattoes.

"Your house?" I said, putting down the two suitcases. "Excuse me, Monsieur, but is this not the house of Marcel Argenton?"

"Technically, it is," he replied. My family, also, had put down their burdens to listen. "But Monsieur Argenton has rented it to me for the summer."

"There must be some mistake," I said. "Monsieur Argenton has rented the house to me for the next three weeks. I can show you the lease."

"Me also, I could show you the lease if I had it with me. I rented the house only the past week, through the agent Privas, in Fort-de-France."

"Ah," I said, "that explains it. I met Monsieur Argenton in the United States, three months past. I rented the house from him directly, and I suppose he forgot to cancel his listing with the local agent. I regret to cause you of the trouble—"

"You will not cause me of the trouble, Monsieur. On the contrary, it is I who must excuse myself for dispossessing you."

This was going to be sticky. Luckily, I outweighed the man by twenty pounds and was in good condition for a man of sedentary

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

occupation. I put on my fighting face.

"You will not dispossess me, Monsieur," I said. "I am here; my lease antedates yours; and here I stay."

The man started to say something, then jerked his head around as another man appeared. This was a stocky, muscular, black Martiniquais in shabby shirt, pants, sandals, and a big straw hat with a wide, unbound brim. He parked his bicycle, looked from one to the other, and said:

"Which of you gentlemen is the Monsieur Nevuree?"

"I think that you mean me, Wilson Newbury," I said. "Are you Jacques Lecouvreur, from Schoelcher?"

"Yes, Monsieur. Monsieur Argenton arranged that I should work for you."

"That's good, Jacques. Please, help the family to carry this baggage into the house."

"Lecouvreur!" said the yellow man sharply. "Knowest thou who I am?" He used the familiar form.

Jacques Lecouvreur looked puzzled. "Are you — are you that Haitian gentleman, Monsieur Duchamps?"

"C'est moi, donc. Now tell Monsieur Newbury that, when I demand that he retire and leave the house to me, who has a valid lease, he would do better to comply."

Jacques's eyes grew large. "Oh, Monsieur Newbury, this is a bad business! He can make of the trouble for you."

"I have known of the trouble before," I said. "Carry that baggage into the house, Jacques. Go on, Denise; go on, kids. Take the stuff in."

Duchamps's lips tightened; he took a step towards me, with a malevolent look in his eyes. I stood my ground. After a silent minute of confrontation, Duchamps said, "You will regret this, Monsieur." He turned and walked away down the drive.

As soon as we were settled, I called Jacques Lecouvreur aside. I had met Marcel Argenton, a white Martiniquais, at a bankers' convention in New York. Learning that he was from Martinique, I expressed a wish to spend a vacation there. He explained that he planned to go to France for the month of June — something to do with exports of sugar — and that I might rent his house, near the shore between Fort-de-France and Schoelcher, during that time.

Argenton had also arranged for Jacques Lecouvreur to work for me. Jacques was a fisherman of Schoelcher, but he wanted the job to get money for an outboard motor. I asked Jacques:

"What's all this about Du-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

champs? Who or what is he?"

Jacques gave a little shiver. "I do not know, Monsieur. I know nothing at all."

"Oh, yes, you know! *Allons.*"

With a little gentle arm-twisting, I got it out of him: "He is Oreste Duchamps, a big *guimboiseur* from Haiti."

"A *what?*" the word was strange to me.

"You know, Monsieur: a *houngan; a bocor.* What you would call a *sorcier.*"

"Oh, a sorcerer! A priest of voodoo, *hein?*"

"Ah, no, Monsieur. Respectable followers of *vodun* will have nothing to do with him. Me, I am good Catholic; but not all partisans of *vodun* are so wicked as the priests would like us to think. But Monsieur Duchamps has his own following. He is trying to bring all the *bourhousses* of the island under his control. He is a bad one to mock oneself of."

I sighed. Although I am no more psychic than Paddy's pig, I seem to draw such people as garbage draws flies.

We spent the rest of the day at moving in and setting up. During this time, we drove Jacques to the village of Schoelcher, named for a man instrumental in freeing the slaves in 1848. Denise laid in a stock of food.

While she shopped, Jacques showed me his boat, the *St. Timothée*, drawn up on the beach with a score of others. They were narrow, sharp-ended craft, with the peculiar projecting keel found in Caribbean fishing boats. This keel sticks out beyond the stem like the ram of a battleship of 1900. Nearly all the boats had good Catholic names — *St. Pierre, St. Jean, Sainte Famille* — but one fisherman, evidently a Muslim, defiantly called his boat the *Inchallah.*

Jacques explained how he meant to attach the motor. He spoke volubly but mostly in such strong Créole that the meaning passed me by. Denise claims to understand it, but she is a Frenchwoman born and thus familiar with at least some French dialects. Still, Jacques had given much thought to the motor, comparing models and taking measurements.

Having promised us a cook, he went away and came back with a huge, shapeless, scowling mass of black fat, with her belongings tied up in a flour sack. She wore one of those turbans they make by folding a bandana around a cap of newspaper, with the points sticking up. Jacques introduced her as Mme. Claudine Boussac. We squeezed her into the station wagon and drove back to Argenton's house.

I was not prepossessed by Claudine's looks. Nonetheless, after our

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

servantless life in the land of the free, it seemed like an almost indecent luxury to have people to fetch and carry for very modest wages. I felt a little guilty about such economic imperialism. It was made possible by the fact that, despite some progress, most of the folk of these isles of the Spanish Main were still dirt poor. But then, if I did not hire Jacques and did the fetching and carrying myself, poor Jacques could not buy the outboard motor on which his heart was set.

When evening came, Claudine was rattling about the kitchen. Denise and I were enjoying daiquiris on the veranda; any liquor but rum is sky-high in Martinique. We were admiring the blaze of the hibiscus and bougainvillaea, sniffing the aroma of a million blossoms, and watching the lizards scuttle, when the drumming began.

It was a dry, metallic tap-tap-tappety-tap, as if someone were hitting an empty kerosene can. It did not seem to come from any particular direction. I wondered if some of the locals had gotten up a steel band, on the Trinidadian model, and were practicing on their tuned oil drums.

Jacques came out on the porch to tell us that dinner was ready. Then he froze, bug-eyed and slack-mouthed. If he could have turned pale, I am sure he would have.

"Come on, Jacques!" I said.

"Those drums," he said, almost in a whisper. "That is the deed of Monsieur Duchamps."

"Eh bien? No one has ever died of a little drumming."

"If that were all—" he said and finished with a Créole sentence that I missed.

We had seen something of Fort-de-France; besides, that city, lying in a bowl of surrounding hills, gets uncomfortably hot in summer. So next day we drove in the other direction, to St. Pierre and Mt. Pelée. You cannot appreciate what a huge thing this mile-high "Bald Mountain" is until you have seen it looming, its summit hidden in condensation clouds.

We stopped at St. Pierre, a narrow, crescent-shaped town built on a slope arising from the shore. Clumps of pale-green banana trees grew on the adjacent slopes. Once the island's main city, St. Pierre is now hardly more than a village. There are still Pompeii-like ruins left over from the great eruption of 1902. We poked around these and went through the museum, viewing the samples of glassware and metallic objects fused into lumps by the heat of the death cloud.

"But," said daughter Héloise, "if the volcano was erupting for a week before the disaster, why didn't the people get away?"

"It was the governor, Louis

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mouttet," I said. "Although he was appointed by Paris, they had a local legislature, and an election was coming up. The Liberals represented the white planter class, who had all the money; the Radicals were mostly Negroes, who had the numbers. The governor, who backed the Liberals, feared that any public disturbance might lose the election for them."

"You sound like a Communist," said little Priscille. "Bankers aren't supposed to talk that way."

"Never mind how bankers are supposed to talk. That's what happened. Anyway, those caste distinctions have pretty well broken down by now.

"So Mouttet opposed any plan for evacuation. He even posted soldiers on the road to Fort-de-France to turn back fugitives. Then, at eight o'clock on the morning of May eighth, 1902, off she went. Wiped out thirty-odd thousand people in a few minutes. The only survivor in the main part of town was a condemned murderer in an underground cell. Men didn't beat that record of destruction until they got the atomic bomb."

"What happened to the governor?" asked Stephen.

"Nobody knows. He was in St. Pierre at the time, but they never found his body."

We returned in the late afternoon. The roads were fairly good as to surface, having little heavy truck traffic and no freezing winters to tear them up. They are, however, the most hair-raising roads I have ever driven.

On the way back from St. Pierre, the road goes down a slope that calls for low gear to avoid burning your brakes. Then it turns sharply to the left. If you miss the turn, you go right on down into the blue Caribbean, hundreds of feet below. A heavy steel guard rail at the turn had been pushed over and squashed flat; somebody had not made it. I see why they have no roller coasters in Fort-de-France. With the roads, who needs them?"

At cocktail time, the drumming began again. Jacques came out in even greater agitation.

"Monsieur Newbury!" he said, "Look what I found under the house!"

He held out the separated parts of a little bird: the head, the wings, and the legs.

"That's a lugubrious thing to show at mealtime," I said. "What in the name of God is it?"

"It is a *wanga,* Monsieur."

"You mean some sort of bad-luck charm? What about it?"

"It appeared under the house. I do not know how it arrived there; I have been working around the place all day. But there it was."

"Eh bien, put it in the garbage can."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jacques sighed. "I wish you well, Monsieur, but I do not know if —" The rest was Créole.

That night, I dreamed I was walking a street in St. Pierre as it was before the eruption. The sun had risen some time before, but the town was so blanketed with black smoke that it was almost as dark as night.

A few others were up and about. Their footsteps made no sound, because of a layer of dark-gray, powdery volcanic ash, several centimeters deep, which covered the streets. I doubt if I could have heard them anyway, over the roar of the volcano. It was eight kilometers away but loomed huge — such of it as could be seen through the murk — even at that distance. The roaring was punctuated by explosions; boulder-sized lava bombs crashed down on the houses.

Then the people in the street were crying out and pointing towards Pelée. An enormous cloud, distinct from the general pall of smoke, had appeared on the side of the mountain. It was a bright incandescent red, and black around the edges. That is, the interior was red-hot and the surface black. One could see the redness, mottled and shifting, through this black integument.

This ameboid, fiery blob moved swiftly down the mountainside towards the city, flowing over intervening ridges and growing ever larger. I knew what it was: a mixture of incandescent gas and volcanic dust. The high temperature kept it churning, so that the dust could not settle out. At the same time, the dust gave the mass a specific gravity higher than that of air, so the cloud slid down the slope at turnpike speed.

In a few minutes, the red cloud reached the upper parts of the city. The heat became blistering. Buildings in the path of the cloud burst into flames, as if they were paper houses doused with gasoline and ignited.

The cloud slowed up as it reached the lower town, where the slope was less steep. All of a sudden, the streets were full of people running and screaming with their clothes afire. Some fell and lay writhing. Some, left naked by the burning of their garments, burst open. Can you imagine the sight of hundreds running and being burned alive at the same time? Their shrieks merged into a continuous ululation, audible even over the roar of the mountain. My own clothes smoldered and started to burn....

"Wake up, Willy!" cried Denise, shaking me. "What is it?"

I groggily rubbed the sleep from my eyes and told her.

"No wonder you screamed!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she said. "Now go back to sleep, darling. You are safe here."

The appalling sight I had seen, however, kept me awake for an hour. When I did get to sleep, there I was, back in St. Pierre a few minutes before the eruption. Again the great red cloud of death oozed out of the mountain. While one part of me realized that this was a dream, the rest of me went through all the emotions of a victim, until my shrieks again led Denise to awaken me. I got no more sleep that night.

We spent the next day on Argenton's private little stretch of beach of black volcanic sand. I brought along a pocket timer to make sure that nobody stayed too long in one position in the bright Caribbean sun. But I got drowsy myself, went to sleep on my belly without setting the timer, and woke an hour later with a burned back.

That evening, the drums were at it again. I asked Jacques, "Any more wangas today?"

"No, Monsieur. But do you do well? I heard you call out in the night."

"Just a bad dream, from reading too much about Mt. Pelée."

Jacques looked sorrowful. "I tell you, Monsieur, that Duchamps is a bad man to cross."

"That's his problem."

"If you say it, Monsieur."

That night, I dreamed I was back in St. Pierre again, on that fatal morning in 1902.

"Willy," said Denise, "we must do something about this. A middle-aged man cannot go without sleeping, night after night."

"Okay, I'll see a doctor. We were going to Fort-de-France anyway."

We had one minor set-to with our undergraduate older daughter. She wanted to visit the city in what was then the new uniform of rebellious youth: ragged blue jeans and a man's shirt tied up to expose the midriff. (The youth revolt had just come to a boil in the Unites States.) Denise and I stood firm, insisting that such scruffy garb was unbecoming to foreigners in a proper French city.

"Even if they're black," I said, "these people are just as French as the white Frenchmen of France. Same virtues, same faults. One thing they don't like is for outsiders to come in and throw their weight around."

Héloise gave in, put on a dress, and sulked for a couple of hours.

Fort-de-France is a bustling, businesslike place, with little tropical languor. We took one another's pictures standing before the statue of the Empress Josephine; having been born there, she is the leading icon of Martinique. We toured through the Museum of Fort. St.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Louis, ate a huge but delicious French restaurant lunch, and shopped. At least, the girls shopped. Stephen and I wearily stood or sat, save when Stephen bought one of those strange, cartwheel-shaped straw hats they wear on Guadeloupe.

After Denise had, with a few well-chosen French words, verbally beheaded a snippy black salesgirl in M. Alfred Reynard's perfumery shop, we hunted up a physician listed in the international medical directory. He gave me a phial of sleeping pills.

"If it marches not," he said, "come back and we will try something else."

We had a fine dinner at The Hippopotamus. I said, "If I eat here very often, I'll begin to look like a hippo myself."

Back at the Argenton house, Jacques had left, to bike back to Schoelcher and his family. The next day, Sunday, he had off.

Jacques Lecouvreur seemed a good man and not unintelligent, but Claudine left much to be desired. She was a sullen slattern, who drank a lot and cooked badly. When Denise, with the proper French reverence for food, gave her instructions, she listened dumbly and then went on doing exactly as before. Héloise, full of what she thought were advanced ideas, explained Claudine's behavior as a case of colonial neurosis, brought on by capitalistic exploitation. I, however, think Claudine would have been the same anywhere.

We had drums that evening, but, thanks to the pills of *Monsieur le médecin,* no more dreams. Nor did I suffer any Sunday night, either.

Monday morning, we were loading the car for an expedition to the church of Sacré Coeur de Mont martre de Balata and to Morne Rouge, when Oreste Duchamps again materialized in our driveway. He gave a strained little smile and a polite greeting.

"Does all go well with you, Monsieur?" he said.

"Very well, thank you."

"Have you decided to leave?"

"At the end of my three weeks, Monsieur, not before."

"You have not been incommoded by any — ah — psychic manifestations?"

"No, Monsieur, I have not. To what do you refer? Do you know something special?"

He shrugged. "There are rumors, such as the recent one of the phantom of Louis Mouttet. But we, as civilized men, dismiss them as the idle superstition. Still, I asked myself."

"Well, you may cease to concern yourself, Monsieur. All marches well."

He growled something about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"bâtards blancs" and walked off.

That evening, Claudine came out on the porch with another wanga, made of parts of a rat.

"Bad place," she said. "I think you better go."

At least, that is what I think she said. Jacques could speak *français ordinaire* when he put his mind to it, but Claudine had only Créole.

That night, Denise and I were just going into our bedroom, when she said, "What is that on the floor? A piece of old rope —"

Her words were cut off as I grabbed her and swung her around behind me. In the gloom of Argenton's inadequate electric lighting, I saw the rope move. It whipped into a spiral coil and drew back its head to strike.

"Snake!" I said. "Get me a broom, quick!"

Then it was simply a matter of whacking the reptile with the broom handle until it was dead, despite its efforts to strike.

The snake was a fer-de-lance about a meter long, brown with black diamond-shaped markings like those of a rattlesnake. It had the wide, heart-shaped head of the rattlesnakes and all the other pit vipers.

"Monsieur Duchamps doesn't give up easily," I said. "I'll try the cops."

* * *

Next morning, I drove into Fort-de-France and stopped at the nearest police station. I brought the battered carcass of the fer-de-lance in a paper bag. The man on the desk referred me to a *brigadier* or sergeant of police, Hippolyte Frot.

Sergeant Frot was a big black man, as tall as I, younger, and heavier, with the beginnings of a paunch. I told him my tale, and he examined the snake in a relaxed and genial manner.

"They have become rare since the introduction of the mongoose," he said. "The only time we see them is when some peasant brings one down from the hills, to stage a snake-and-mongoose fight. Some like them better than cockfights."

That is not what my biologist friends at the Museum of Natural Science tell me. They say the mongoose generally avoids the pit vipers, whose strike is much faster than a cobra's. Instead, the mongooses have wrought such havoc among the West Indian birds, lizards, and other small game, not to mention the farmers' chickens, that on some islands the bounty has been taken off the snakes and put on the mongooses instead. Still, I was not going to argue the matter with Frot.

"About this Duchamps," he went on, "you understand, Monsieur Newbury, that we have the freedom of religion here. If Du

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

champs wants to proselyte his primitive polytheism, that is his affair, so long as he behaves himself. Such superstititions are all but extinct on this island, anyway."

West Indians like to deny that there is any voodoo left, at least on whatever island the speaker belongs to. Other islands may still have it, he says, but not *his,* which is much too advanced and cultured.

"On the other hand," continued Frot, "we must not forget the *mission civilisatrice* of France. This demands that things be done in an orderly, civilized manner. If the cult of Duchamps creates disturbances or introduces serpents into houses, we shall have to take stern action. But please remember that, from what you have told me, we have no evidence that the serpent did not crawl into your house on its own initiative. We could not arrest Duchamps on any such accusation.

"Permit me to suggest that you leave the remains of the serpent with me. I shall assign men to look in on the house of Monsieur Argenton from time to time. If there are any further manifestations, be sure to let me know. What is your telephone number?"

"There is no telephone. I came here to get away from such trammels of civilization."

Frot chuckled. "But now it seems a less admirable idea, *hein?* I have seen it before. We find that the oars of civilization raise blisters on our hands and cause our back muscles to ache. So we cast them away. Then we find that the current carries our little boat towards the cascade. So we try to snatch the oars back, if they have not drifted out of reach. Anyway, you have an automobile, so keep me informed."

For several days, there were no more manifestations, save for the nightly serenades of the drummers. The children caught on, as children will, despite Denise's and my efforts not to discuss the matter before them. Stephen, who had been writing notes for a high-school paper on Martinique, which he meant to present next fall, said:

"If this Duchamps gives any more trouble, Dad, why don't you shoot him and claim self-defense?"

"First," I said, "because I don't have a gun and, second, because the law wouldn't recognize an attack by witchcraft as a legitimate excuse for killing anybody."

Héloise said, "They'd convict him of murder, stupid, and cut off his head with a guillotine."

"Gee!" cried Priscille. "Wouldn't that be something to see? Of course, we'd miss you, Dad."

"Thanks," I said. "Actually they don't use the guillotine here. They hang miscreants."

"Why?" asked Stephen.

"They tried a guillotine during

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the French Revolution, but it didn't work. The dampness warped the wooden uprights, so the slicer tended to stick on the way down. Sometimes the poor fellow's head would be cut only half off."

"Nowadays you could use a steel or aluminum frame —" began Stephen.

"What a conversation for breakfast!" said Denise.

"Oh," said Priscille, "I like a little blood and gore with my meals."

At cocktail time, Denise said, "Willy, we must get rid of that Claudine. She does nothing right, and I cannot teach her. I had a hundred times rather cook myself than to spend hours trying to beat sense into her thick head."

Jacques Lecouvreur overheard. He said, "Pardon me, Monsieur and Madame. Please do not do that."

"And why not, if we choose?" said Denise with hauteur.

"She would put a curse on the house. She is in with the *bourhousses.*"

"Oh?" said I. "Then why did you hire her for us, Jacques?"

"Please, Monsieur, I did not know then. I am very sorry. I found out later that she has the power. If she cursed the house, not even a good Catholic exorcism could lift it. You would have to hire a team of *chango* dancers to drive out the evil spirits, and all the troupes hereabout are under the control of Monsieur Duchamps."

"She is hardly the species of person we want for our cook," I said. "She might poison us. In fact, I sometimes suspect that she has been trying to do just that."

"I know, Monsieur, I know. But, if you dismiss her, I must go, too."

"Why? We don't want to lose you, Jacques."

"You do not understand, Monsieur. If she put a curse on this house, the misfortunes of those who stayed would descend on me, also. I must consider my family."

"We'll think it over," I said.

As often happens, we thought it over so long that we finally decided, tacitly, that with only a week more to stay, there was no use in stirring up unpleasantness. Besides, we had taken to driving in to Fort-de-France for dinner at The Hippopotamus, the Chez Etienne, and other establishments.

The drumming continued, becoming ever louder and more insistent. One morning, Jacques said:

"Monsieur, I have a message from Monsieur Duchamps. It was circulated to me through Claudine."

"Well?"

"He says that this is your last chance. If you have not departed by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the fall of the night, he will not be responsible for your safety."

"Kind of him," I said. "Tell him that, while I regret the withdrawal of his protection, I shall have to manage the best possible."

"He also spoke a Créole proverb: *'Fer couper fer.'* Do you understand, Monsieur?"

"I think he meant: 'Iron to cut iron,' or 'Extreme cases demand extreme remedies.' Right?"

"Oui. And, oh, there is one more thing." Jacques fidgeted, then brought out the hand he had held behind him. It gripped a human skull, minus the mandible and most of the teeth. "I found this on the sill of the door this morning."

I examined the skull. "Another wanga?"

Jacques frowned thoughtfully. "Not exactly, Monsieur. A veritable wanga is made of the parts of a bird or an animal, according to a formula. It is sung and danced over in a certain way, to reduce the spirits to one's service. This is more a simple warning gesture. I think I know where it came from."

"Where?"

"There is a beach on Guadeloupe where, they say, long ago the English and French soldiers killed in fighting the Caribs are buried. Now the sea is eroding it, and one can find all the bones and skulls one wants."

"Put it on the mantelpiece," I said. "I may take it home with me."

Jacques departed, shaking his head at the whims of these crazy Americans.

I drove into Fort-de-France to see my philosophical sergeant. Frot said, "We still have nothing to go on. This obeah man has been careful not to utter legally actionable threats —"

"Obeah man?" I said. "I thought Obeah was the Jamaican variety of *vodun.*"

Frot smiled. "You do not know that there has been an ecumenical movement among the Afro-Caribbean supernaturalists? The obeah men, the *houngans,* and the *guimboiseurs* assemble in councils, to debate whether Obboney or Damballah shall be considered the number one god, or whether they are but different names for the same being. They have the same trouble in finding common ground that Christians have had under similar circumstances. But, despite some fierce theological disputes, they seem to be hammering out some species of unity. So the old distinctions no longer apply.

"We will, however, try to keep your section under closer surveillance. Be sure to report to me anything that could form the ground of a formal complaint."

"Thank you, Sergeant," I said. "You're very kind."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's nothing. It is just that I am enchanted to meet an American who speaks the good French. You know, your compatriots come here, counting on everyone to know their own language; and when people do not, they shout at them in an uncivilized manner. *Bonne chance,* Monsieur."

We put in a strenuous day on the beach, swimming and playing games. When it was over, we ate one of Claudine's indifferent dinners. The kids were tired enough to go to bed early, but I felt full of life. The drumming had died away, so the only sound was the chirp of a million crickets. I said to Denise:

"Let's take a walk on the beach. The moon is full."

So we did. Our stroll ended in an impromptu swim, and then we made love on the sand.

We dressed and, hand in hand, started back for the house. We had climbed halfway up the steep path when a man stepped out of the shadow of a banana tree. The moon threw silvery spots on him, so that I had an impression that he was white of skin and stout, with curly hair and a little beard.

Without a word, the man came towards us, down the path.

"Who are you?" I said.

The man continued his silent advance. The moon gleamed upon a machete blade.

"Run, Denise!" I said in English. "I'll hold this guy off. Get the cops!"

When I glanced around, Denise had vanished. I heard faint, receding footfalls. Although she, like me, was no longer so young as once, she still could run like a deer.

The man with the knife came on. My thought was to get around him to the house to telephone. Then I remembered we had no phone. Perhaps, if I could get to the station wagon, I could lock myself in. I might even use it as a weapon, if I could catch him on the roadway in front of the vehicle. But that would leave our sleeping children....

While these thoughts ran through my head, the man kept coming. Another step, and he would be within slashing distance. If I ran back to the beach, I should lead him on Denise's trail.

Instead, I cut off at right angles to the path, into the wild growth. I blundered into shrubs and trees, sounding like a herd of stampeding elephants. I felt like one of those characters in Fenimore Cooper who, whenever there is the utmost need for silence, always steps on a dry twig.

A glance back showed the man coming after me. When he encountered thick shrubbery, a slash sent it tumbling. The man was no insubstantial wraith or illusion. While I moved faster than he in the open, he got through the heavy stuff at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

least as fast as I did.

I tried to circle around him to get to the house, but he kept angling off to keep himself between me and it. I worried about getting lost. That would be no matter in daylight, when one could always tell direction by sun and sea. Night was something else.

The man got closer, herding me away from the Argenton house. Thinking that such a tubby fellow would get winded sooner than I, I led him straight up the slope. He plodded after, now losing a meter, now gaining one.

The distance to the Fort-de-France road seemed much farther than I remembered it. But, then, I had not made the climb before on foot, at night, through tropical vegetation. After me came the man with the machete.

When I came out on the road, I was bushed. My pounding heart and laboring lungs reminded me that I was, after all, pushing fifty. My pursuer, too, emerged on the road. He did not seem to pant or labor at all.

As the man came out into full moonlight, I saw that his face bore a blank, unwinking stare. Tales of zombies ran through my head. Without a word or a cry, he trotted towards me, swinging the machete.

I thought that, even with my longer legs, I could not escape him along the road, since he did not seem to tire like normal mortals. On the other side was a stand of banana trees, once cultivated but now growing wild. Their huge, ragged leaves afforded easy cover, in which I might be able to lose him.

I plunged into the bananas. At first I thought I was gaining. I tried to throw him off by changing direction, but my woodcraft was not up to moving silently. Every time I looked back, there he was, plodding along. If I could only find a club, now, I could parry that slash and then clout him over the head or ram it into his belly....

There were no clubs. I passed a clump of bamboo. A length of bamboo would do fine, but I needed time and my own machete to cut a stalk and shape it. I blundered on.

Then I could go no further. I had no idea where I was, and the man was still coming. I thought of lunging at him, head down in a football tackle. If I could duck beneath the swing of the cutlass....

Panting, I crouched and spread my arms. On he came, the machete before him. Up it went.

Someone shouted: *"Halte-là!"*

When my pursuer kept on, a flash and explosion defeaned and blinded me. The man was whirled around. He fell, and I saw that one of his legs had been hit. The trouser leg was torn and darkening, and the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leg had a bend where none should be.

Still, the fellow recovered and began hopping grotesquely towards me, dragging the wounded leg. A second report brought him down again. Still he crawled nearer, using his arms alone, with both shattered legs trailing. He still gripped his machete.

A third shot spattered brains. The man lay still.

A man in uniform stepped into the moonlight, replacing the spent cartridges in a revolver. Although the peak of the képi shadowed his shiny black face, I knew Hippolyte Frot.

"Well, Monsieur!" he said. "If you had not fled so fast and drawn this species of camel after you, the affair would have been finished long ago. My faith, I have never seen a man with gray hair run through the woods like you! Are you a retired Olympic champion?"

When I could get my breath, I said, "It is like the tale of the rabbit who escaped the fox: the rabbit ran faster for his life than the fox for his dinner. Where did you come from so *à propos?*"

"I told you we were going to watch this section more closely."

Frot holstered his pistol. I recognized it as one of those .44 magnums, which have almost the punch of an elephant gun and a recoil to match. I used to be a pretty good pistol shot, but if I had to shoot one of those things, I'd grip it in both hands to keep it from getting away from me.

Sergeant Frot shone a flashlight on the body. He said, *"O mon Dieu!"*

"What is it?"

He turned a face on which, even in shadow, I could see bewilderment. In a man as well-integrated and self-possessed as Hippolyte Frot, that was alarming. He said:

"Do you know who this is?"

"No. Who is it?"

"This is Louis Mouttet, the rascally governor who perished in the great eruption — or else someone made up to resemble him. I have seen photographs of the original Mouttet, and there is no error. *Formidable!*"

"That was over sixty years ago!"

"Exactly. But, you know, the body of Mouttet was never found, although the government made strenuous efforts to identify the victims."

"You mean some gang of *bourhousses* has been keeping Mouttet as a zombi all this time? And Duchamps borrowed the body to send against me?"

"Monsieur," said Frot heavily, "you may indulge in such speculations if you like. We have the freedom of opinion. But we also have the *mission civilsatrice* of France.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For that reason, I cannot permit this explanation to enter the official records. It is undoubtedly a man, the mind of whom has been turned by the preachings of Duchamps and his like and who was chosen to accentuate a natural resemblance to the real Mouttet. Back, if you please!"

Frot drew the big revolver and fired one more shot into the corpse's head, at such an angle that the bullet came out the face. That face was instantly reduced to a gory ruin, which nobody could have identified.

"Now," he said, "there will be no more cause to spread these rumors that lend themselves to primitive superstition. As you know, Monsieur Newbury, the civilization is but a thin crust over our savage interiors, no matter if our skins be white or black. We must try to keep this shell of egg intact."

I heard a thrashing in the banana grove and a halloo.

"Oui, nous y sommes," called Frot. *"Tout va bien."*

It was Denise and two policemen from Frot's station, drawn by the shots. She had circled around to the house. After the zombi and I had plunged into the banana grove, she got into the car and drove like mad to Fort-de-France. There they told her that Frot was out patrolling our area himself; but, in view of the seriousness of the situation, two of the *flics* had returned with her.

Jacques Lecouvreur got his motor. Having had engineering training in my youth, I helped him install it. Stephen and I lent a hand to the villagers of Schoelcher at hauling in the net on one of their seining operations.

The next time I saw Frot, I asked about Oreste Duchamps.

"Deported to his native Haiti," said the sergeant. "We cannot permit such primitive buffooneries to trouble the course of our civilization. And what of you, Monsieur?"

"All is tranquil, thank you, save that our cook has disappeared. I think she was in league with Duchamps. She was a terrible cook, anyhow, and we leave a few days hence."

"In that case, Monsieur, I think you need fear no further disturbances. Perhaps you would care to extend your sojourn? Really, you should give Martinique a chance to show how charming she can be, when she is not vexed by barbarous intriguers."

"I am tempted, but my job calls me back."

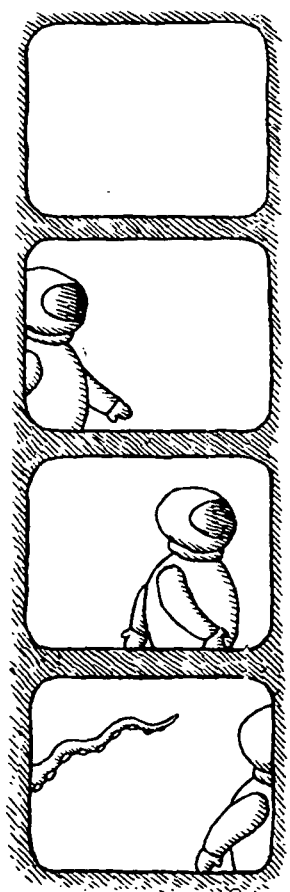
"Till next time, then."

"*À coup sûr,* Monsieur Frot. But you may be certain that, if ever again I rent a house in a foreign land, I will make sure that I am the only one with a lease!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BAIRD SEARLES

Films and Television



WHIMSY ONE

The somewhat ambiguous title of this month's offering was brought about by the fact that I had been going to do a piece about a whimsical TV series that I'd been procrastinating about for some time, but as so often happens, something of more immediacy came up. It, too, is whimsical; next month, the gods not interfering, we will have Whimsy Two, the piece I have been putting off.

It is curious that for the past several months, the subjects of this column have been of the rarest of the three subgenres of speculative fiction, pure fantasy. It is particularly rare in cinema; supernatural and science fictional films abound, but fantasy per se is relegated for the most part to movies for kiddies.

There is one period that spawned a fair number of adult fantasies (the use of the word "adult" is, however, relative). This was the decade of the '40s, when the tastemakers of Hollywood decided the American public needed cute and whimsical subject matter to take our minds off the war and just postwar gloom and doom.

So we got a spate of lackwit leprechauns (Cecil Kellaway in *The Luck of the Irish*), meddlesome

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

angels (Cary Grant in *The Bishop's Wife*), and *The Boy With Green Hair* (Dean Stockwell).

One of the most popular of these was the 1941 *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* (based on a play called *Heaven Can Wait*). It had to do with a none-too-bright boxer whose soul is taken to heaven before its due time; a heavenly messenger (Mr. Jordan) tries to rectify the matter by putting Joe (the boxer) into a just-vacated body belonging to a rich man. Endless confusion results; much hilarity (?) is to be had from the fact that only Joe can see Mr. Jordan and seems to talk to himself a lot.

Joe's great ambition is to win the Big Bout with his current body. More complication is introduced when he falls in love, and balks at leaving the body he had agreed to use for only a limited time.

I have a soft spot in my heart (some might say my head) for many of the films of the '40s. But this one I find very hard to take. It makes no sense theologically, rationally, or comedically; the humor supposedly lies in the various characters' reactions to the bizarre situation, but these are so dimwitted that I wholeheartedly consigned the whole cast to perdition before the movie was half over.

Now there is a remake of this insipid whimsicality called *Heaven Can Wait* (to compound confusion, there was a delightful '40s film called *Heaven Can Wait* which has nothing to do with any of this). I wondered how even such high class contemporary humor mongers as Elaine May (co-scriptwriter) and Buck Henry (co-director) could passably update this sodden cuteness for present day taste. The answer is simple: they didn't.

Oh, there are superficial changes. Joe is now a football player (football having replaced boxing as the big American lower middle class sport) and it's all in glorious color, but the characters are just as sappy, the level of humor is still defined by Joe talking to the invisible-to-everyone-else Mr. Jordan, and there isn't an iota of subtlety to be found.

I had, out of the whole thing, two laughs and two chuckles. The two laughts were both at screams by Dyan Cannon, who as the rich body's murderous wife, might have saved the show given more to do. One chuckle was at Joe as the rich man confronting an ecology group, murmuring confusedly, "We *can* porpoises?" The other was at the expression on the face of the butler (Joseph Maher) when Joe democratically takes the tray from his hands and gives him a drink.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The only other positive thing I can say for *Heaven Can Wait* concerns Warren Beatty's performance as Joe. Aside from the above mentioned moment the material doesn't allow him much in the way of humor (for which he has only himself to blame, since he co-scripted, co-directed, and produced), but he does do a superb job of portraying a rather endearing but hopelessly dumb athletic type. The urbane Robert Montgomery, who played Joe in the earlier version, was about as convincing as Cheetah playing King Kong.

James Mason was his usual impeccable self as Mr. Jordan (and there he had the formidable memory of Claude Raines in the original to cope with). The admirable Julie Christie, as the ecologically minded lady with whom Joe falls in love, is rather lost in a role that seems to have been written for Jean Arthur. She may have won an Oscar for *Darling,* but she's not that kind of darling.

An aspect of this movie that worries me a bit is its total fidelity to the '40s version in its absolutely simplistic philosophy that poor people are good, especially dumb athletic types (you'd never guess the size of pro sport salaries from Joe's milieu), and rich people are bad. This is the kind of mindless stereotyping Hollywood did in the '40s and '50s. If I may be allowed a bit of cultural philosophizing, we are obviously going into a cycle of mindless entertainment. This can be good fun (Star Wars) or hopelessly discouraging, as in the near-100% pap that has been produced for TV in the past two years (*Charlie's Angels* et al.) Even commercials, which ten years ago, were fairly often creative or amusing, are now totally aimed at the dim-witted housewife or the henpecked husband (more classic stereotyping).

Oh, well, let your brain go limp and enjoy it. Next month, *Whimsy Two,* unless something more engaging — like a ten-episode Masterpiece Theatre version of *Slave Girl of Gor* — appears.

I have never taken up a save-a-program crusade in this column before, but I must admit to being unhappy that *Quark* is gone. There is a National Save Quark Association that requests like minded people to write their local NBC station regretting its demise, and to send a copy of the letter to the NSQA at 8869 Brierwood Rd., Jacksonville, Fla. 32217. Good luck there, chaps. The show was cut down before its time.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Joseph Green and Patrice Milton ("To See the Stars That Blind," March 1977) return with a fascinating piece of sf about an ancient drama played out on a planet far from Earth.

The Wind Among The Mindymuns

by JOSEPH GREEN and PATRICE MILTON

My name is Talisker Skye. I'm from the Isle of Skye, off the West Coast of Scotland, and I legally adopted the name to honor my home and its very best product, Talisker Whisky. I was raised on the hearty brew, sucked it in with my mother's milk, so to speak, and get thoroughly snockered on it whenever I'm home. But I suppose that's no way to start an official record. Someone might actually find this damn minicorder someday, and then it will look as if World U sends drunks out into the Big U ... but what I wouldn't give for a warming drink of Scotch right now!

My God! but it's cold up here! I'm just a few klicks from the first steep rise into the pass, hiding in the last of the trees. Behind me, where the grass begins, I can see the westernmost village of the Golds, surrounded by its ragged fields of low-yield grain. We were going to improve that plant, or at least Wilson, our geneticist, was. He felt certain a few minor gene rearrangements would double the grain size ... but I shouldn't think about Wilson — or Brackney, Dicks, Kessler, and Onoshi, for that matter. They're dead, and if I hadn't been out at the weather station when that raiding party of Whites hit, I'd be dead too.

I will be soon anyway. If the cold doesn't get me, the first party of Whites that see me will. Those damn rocks ... I hope the first one they throw with that accursed Long Arm gets me right on the noggin. What those rocks did to Kiri Onoshi's lovely little body, when they caught her outside ... Kiri, the only warmth and joy I had on this miserable cold planet. Kiri, who had earned all the advanced degrees they issue in extresbiology but retained the fervent biological desire, inherited from a hundred

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Japanese ancestors, to please any man she let into her bed ... Kiri, whom I loved but never told ... God, I'm sorry.

... But enough of that. Erase those sobs, whoever transcribes this. I'm a scientist too, even if this is my first assignment away from Earth, and I'm just a lowly meteorologist. The Neverlander will be back in one Eryear, and, with luck, they can home in on this unit's automatic distress signal. They tell me the sealed core is practically indestructible, so ... some control, then. A little of the old Scottish reserve needed here. Some coherence in this record, Talisker, if you please.

Only I still wonder why the Golds drove me out, after all the help I gave them planning their defenses. Do they blame me for the shift in the winds that brought on this coming war? Is there any noticeable difference between studying a weather pattern and causing one, in their primitive minds?

The facts are very simple. And very old, a repeat of what has happened thousands of times on Earth. But I suppose when it happens to *you*, and for the first time ... anyway, behind me is a very large alpine valley, about twelve klicks wide and forty long. Four villages of the humanoids we call Golds (the local name for all humanoids is Mindymun) live there, all year long. Ahead of me about fifty klicks is a dry upland plateau, reached fairly easily through the mountain pass directly ahead. A very large single tribe of nomads, whom we call the Whites, always summers on the plain. They drive their herds of oversized goats east each autumn, to winter on a small but luxuriant coastal plain that huddles at the feet of the mountains. But this year the prevailing upper winds changed, and that particular plain got very little rain. The grass is poor, and they want to shift to another coastal area two hundred klicks further north.

There are two routes by which the Whites can reach that alternate pasture, through this pleasant valley or through a higher, much drier and far more rugged pass that will cost the Whites most of this year's crop of young animals. So they plan to come through here. Said herds, being nine-tenths wild, will trample the crops, eat the grain that is almost ready for harvest, and leave the Golds without enough food for the winter.

The Golds intend to hold this pass. The Whites plan to kill the males, steal their crops and females, and leave the way open for an unopposed return trip in the spring. Since the White warriors outnumber the Golds about two to one, and they have their dreaded women's auxiliary as well, they will

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

probably get their way. But there will be a heavy loss of life on both sides.

My part in this ancient drama is very simple. I am supposed to persuade the chief of the Whites to take the upper pass, despite the obvious advantages of this one. Doesn't that sound easy? They barely speak, and I have no scent glands. Oh, I've been assured I smell, but that's a different matter, all Earthpeople smell to the Mindymuns. I have no way of controlling the scents I emit, no powerful pheromones under my conscious will. But the Golds know I communicate fairly well, with gestures and body-languages, and anyway, they don't feel much will be lost if my skull gets bashed. Just one less mouth to feed through the winter, the damnable, unbearable winter.... *Oh God, why did I ever leave Earth!*

Rarnoor paused in the small open space, then snuffled the air three times in rapid sequence. The wind had changed, coming from directly ahead now, and he could walk more swiftly. Running with the wind was safe enough on the open grassland; only a death-seeker tried it among thick trees.

The last passage of air through his expanded nostrils brought a faint, somewhat strange scent. Alarmed, he moved back and forth in the narrow glen, seeking the best breeze; a moment later the smell came again. This time he recognized it. One of the strange small men-from-elsewhere was just ahead.

Rarnoor had added the short people to his memory of known smells while watching these new creatures work around their home-made-of-trees. Then his group had moved on, to spy on the farmers and see what preparations they had made to defend the valley. Ardur's group had lingered, to learn what they could about the strangers and decide whether or not to slay them.

While they were checking the size of the herds, an unlucky shift in the wind had exposed Rarnoor's group to the Gold watchmen. They had tried to flee but had been blocked from the hidden trail and had to fight their way through. The other three warriors had fallen; he had escaped with an arrow in the muscle of his left arm. Rarnoor had pulled it out later and stopped the flow of blood, but his arm was now very sore and useless to him.

The creature called "human" was safely downwind; his nose was virtually useless anyway. Best to kill him here, where there was room to throw. Rarnoor backtracked a few paces, into the shadows of the trees. He found a clear spot and slipped the Long Arm off his back. He would have to swing it one-handed, but all warriors practiced doing that. Only the no-mothers always

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

needed both hands.

Rarnoor selected a good fist-sized rock from the pouch on his left hip. He placed it in the cup on the end of the Long Arm, and grasped the other end. Since surprise was important, he would make a single lift, overhead and away. His flint knife would finish off the hurt enemy.

Poised and ready, Rarnoor waited in silent stillness. It occurred to him that he could simply hide and let the human pass, since his small nose was unlikely to detect him. But that would not be the warrior's way. These creatures lived with the despised grain-eaters in the valley; therefore they must die with them.

The human stepped out into the bright sunlight and paused to let his eyes adjust, a stupid thing even a child would not do. Rarnoor swung the Long Arm off the ground in a hard throw. But stopping the swing with one hand was difficult; he was a trifle slow. The rock stayed cupped a wing-flutter too long and caught the man on the thigh instead of the head.

Rarnoor was already charging, knife drawn, before the human fell. But the man twisted on the ground and drew one of their shiny weapons from its little pouch at his hip, swinging it toward the running warrior. Rarnoor launched himself in a dive, knife raised. A beam of intense red light shot from the end of the glassy tube and caught his wrist. Rarnoor brought his arm down in the death-stroke that would bury the knife deep in the exposed neck — and saw that he was swinging the blackened stump of a wrist. Knife and hand had vanished.

In unbelieving horror, feeling as though this was happening to someone else, or only a strange dream, Rarnoor saw his spurting wrist flap feebly against the man's shoulder. And then the pain reached him, worse than anything he had ever known, making the recent arrow in his arm seem only an insect bite. The ground burned black before his eyes. Rarnoor saw that death was reaching for him. He opened his nostrils for a final deep breath of the smells of life, as a warrior should.

Dear God, when that young White warrior came at me with the knife! ... First the rock that knocked me down, coming almost out of the sun that way so that I saw it one second before it hit ... the only stupid thought I had on the ground was *Oh no! they missed the head!* ... but while my brain was going mad, my more sensible hand was clawing for the laser. I got it out in time to get off one shot, just as he dived at me. I missed the body, but the beam caught the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wrist holding the knife — an accident, I swear it — and burned it off clean. It took a few seconds for the shock to hit, but then it clobbered the fellow, and he collapsed on top of me.

When it dawned on me I was beating a limp body, I pushed the White Mindymun off and sat up. My leg was hurting like hell, but nothing seemed broken. The five-second recharge period had passed, of course. So I raised the laser to finish him off. And then I saw that he was a very young man, not yet full-grown, and I hesitated. My stupid civilized mind betrayed me, with the thought that my son on distant Earth was about his age — although a half-meter shorter. And then I couldn't pull the trigger.

There was an ugly wound in his left biceps, where an arrow had gotten him; his right hand was gone. He was harmless and probably dying anyway. I had nothing to fear.

This was the closest I had gotten to one of the nomadic Whites; I looked him over carefully. The only outstanding difference between the two Mindymuns was their hair and skin color. He was milk-white — evidently their skins don't tan — and black-haired. The Golds are invariably redheads or blonds, with all shades in between. They have a highly bronzed skin that also doesn't tan. Externally the two types seem completely human. You have to get down to biological details to discover just how different they really are.

That was Kiri's specialty, of course. She could talk about the Mindymuns endlessly, starting with the biological differences and following them into the unusual — to us — behavioral patterns. We knew they had noses better than that of any bloodhound on Earth, and scent glands between the fingers they could control at will. Kiri had learned that the big one between the thumb and first finger was a sex attractant in the females, and a fear-inducing aggressive weapon in the males. Comes to that, perhaps we should consider the female armament as "aggressive" also. That should be a joke, but in actual fact they do use the powerful sex-attractant pheromone as a weapon, in some circumstances.

I should be calling all the controlled scents pheromones, according to Kiri. I thought the word meant a very strong sex attractant, but she assured me many insects on Earth use pheromones for very complicated communications, just as these people do. Ants use them to keep the group together and direct organized activities, including sending foragers out after newly discovered food supplies. In fact, pheromones are the primary means of communication between social insect orders, with wing waggling,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

body motion, and attena quivering all secondary.

And it's the same here. I've learned a fair amount of the language, mostly taught to me by Kiri, but she said the combination of sound, head wagging, arm waving and body movement were all supposed to be accompanied by a constant controlled emission of pheromones. Every individual male or female has the same four types and can produce them in highly varying amounts, in different combinations. Strong enoic acid combined with a weak heptanone and just a trace of geraniol can mean one thing; increasing the amount of heptanone can change the message entirely. What makes it especially difficult for us humans is that we have to think how the movements and words are going to be received without the accompanying odors.

As I gazed at the boy-warrior, so human in outward appearance, I thought again of my son. My daughter had been only a baby when I left, the divorce coming swiftly after I signed up for field service ... Mary was not going to be a space-widow, bless her sweet but demanding little soul ... but promotions were almost automatic when you did your postgrad work on another planet, and I had no wish to linger for years as an assistant professor.

Drawing the laser, I reset it to minimum power and did something I knew of only from unused emergency procedures; aimed very carefully, pressed the trigger, and brought the beam down to the spurting stump. It actually worked! The laser cauterized the wound as neatly as a hot iron, and the blood stopped pumping. If he survived the severe stress of shock, this boy might live.

While he was still out, I pulled off the dirt hide shirt and checked his arm wound. The arrowhead had split the muscle bundle from the front; it would heal, but never regain its original strength. I cleaned it with water from my canteen and dabbed on antiseptic from my little emergency kit. Kiri had doctored several Mindymuns during our year here; we knew what medicines were safe to use.

Very slowly and quietly an idea had crept up on me while I worked. If I could make friends with this young killer, persuade him to take me to his tribal chief, I could at least speak my piece before they stoned me. If he lived, and if he could be convinced....

Rarnoor lifted his stump of an arm to point at the circle of hide tents on the slight crest ahead. He could move his left arm now, but that still caused severe pain. The evening-cooking fires were burning, the mothers of the tribe roasting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the day's meat. To their right they could see the herd, bunched loosely together for the night, guarded by boys and girls much younger than Rarnoor. The warriors, from youngest boy to oldest no-mother, were gathered in the open space between the tents. It was obvious the travelers had arrived just in time. The elders could only be discussing the coming move and whether it should be over the dry trail or through the valley of the Golds.

It was a case of weighing the lives of warriors and no-mothers against the expected number of animal losses. Such a matter required much discussion. If it went on too long and the breeze did not blow — though that seldom happened on the grassy plain — the area could become saturated with smells, forcing them to use words and gestures only. That greatly weakened the conviction with which a strong man tried to make his point. Some of the poorer speakers could be driven into fury by their inability to convince with words alone.

Rarnoor wondered if it was true that the Golds had many more spoken words than themselves, and used scents less. He had heard this from the chief of the no-mothers. She said the despised grain-eaters were losing the ability to produce scents at will and that their noses were not as good as those of the Whites. Also, Skye had told him a strange thing during their slow journey here, that the insides of human and Mindymun heads were different, even though shaped much the same. The brains of both looked much alike, but a human had a small "olfactory bulb" and the Mindymuns a much larger one. That was why his people could communicate by scents, as well as use the natural ones in the world around them, and humans could not.

The closed-nose human seemed to think the use of scents was not always an advantage, claiming the center-of-smell took up space needed for other tasks. He said the brain of a Mindymun could never equal that of an Earthman. This sounded like idle bragging to Rarnoor. There were Whites in his tribe who were always throwing off warning scents and then doing nothing to back them up. Perhaps the human was doing the same.

In the long, slow talk they had had after he awoke and found the Earthman had saved his life, Rarnoor had finally come to believe the man was sincere in wanting to see the Whites and Golds avoid war. He needed to live with the Golds for four seasons, until his people-from-the-sky came for him. If he could persuade the Whites to take the hard way east instead of the short but bloody one, the Golds would let

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him abide with them.

Rarnoor turned to Skye and with halting slowness said-and-gestured, "We go to my people now. I will help you speak. Do not be afraid."

Skye nodded, a gesture that seemed to mean "yes" for both species, and Rarnoor led onward. With only one hand left, his scents would be weak, but at least the appeal would not be all talk.

The night-watchers spotted them long before they neared the crest but kept their posts when Rarnoor waved no-danger to them. He led Skye directly to the council fire, unchallenged. They were just in time. All who wished had spoken, and the council was about to vote.

My first chance to use the minicorder in some time. I should have done this last night while the action was fresh in my memory, but I was too tired when the powwow finally ended. Rarnoor — that's a hell of a name to tongue, sounds like "rayon" said over a mouthful of peanut butter — did his best to help me get the message across, but the going was rugged. I could grow to like that kid, primitive savage with small frontal lobe or no. He's loyal; I think the rest really wanted to kill me, but he talked them out of it. Well, not "talked" perhaps, but nevertheless....

That was quite a scene. The council consists of about fifteen male heads-of-extended-families, plus one woman representing the Amazon auxiliary, and the chief, who is always a woman. This tribe looks to number about four thousand people, twice the size of the Gold population in the valley. The wind was rising, and it was damnably cold except right by the big fire, where I tried to stay. The goatskin garments these people wear seem to be warmer than woven fabrics.

Oh, I slept in one of their tents last night! Ingenious as hell, the design. There's a permanently sewn hide hood over the center fire, with two baffles in the flue outside the tent which keep out the rain and wind. The bottom edge of the sewn goatskins is thoroughly pegged down to the grass, and the triangular door-flap ties in place. Surprisingly snug in the cold of the night, so long as someone keeps feeding goat chips to the fire. And their hide bedding, with a thick layer of what seems to be goathair sewn between two sheets, would keep you alive through a blizzard.

Funny thing about weather conditions on the prairie, which I'd already noticed and recorded in the valley. There are very few really strong winds here and almost no such thing as a steady breeze on the ground. Instead, you get constantly changing little zephyrs, small whirls

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and eddies of air almost constantly in motion. This is my field, and I should be able to explain it, but I can't, yet.

I wonder if this pattern of surface winds has anything to do with the Mindymun overreliance on scent? If a smell with a certain message had to spread entirely by diffusion, it would be a dreadfully slow way of saying *Get up into a tree, Jack, the tigers are coming!* If the winds were strong but steady, two people would have to constantly switch positions to talk with each other. They do this a little, I noticed last night, but mostly a speaker waits until the wind is behind him before he starts, and he quits, often right in the middle of a big point, if it blows the other way. Then whoever is upwind of the circle speaks, his turn or not, and the rest listen. When the first speaker gets his chance again, he goes right back to where he was, even if what he wanted to say is no longer relevant. It's not the greatest communications system I've ever seen.

Considering that a raiding party from this tribe just killed all my friends and associates — I shouldn't think of that, it brings Kiri back too strongly, and I can't afford to remember her, I just can't; survival now, that's all that matters — anyway, they were surprisingly cordial to me. It seems they have a tradition that just about anyone can speak to the council, and so I wasn't breaking new ground. Perhaps the Golds knew this, one of the reasons they sent me. With Rarnoor's help I got the message across.

I pointed out that the Golds have bows, which are much better long-distance weapons than rocks, even with the power of that two-meter Long Arm behind them. They will be fighting behind the protection of barricades I helped them design (though I didn't mention my part in the construction) at the end of the pass. They found the rugged path through the mountains which the spying party used to enter the valley, and it is being guarded now — a fact Rarnoor backed me up on, because I had had to persuade the guards there not to kill him when we took that route. In short, I told them, gesturing, bending, and bobbing like a madman, that they might win the battle if they went that way, but the price would be horribly high in human lives. On the other route, only some animals would die.

I thought I was very convincing, making a case for the detour no one could refute. After I finished, there was another tremendous argument, everyone wanting to talk-wave-jump at once. When the hubbub died away, the old chief let each person have his say, and it went on far into the night. But to my amaze-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment, when the vote came, only two councilors sided with me. All the others felt I had much exaggerated their expected losses — and they wanted the Golds cleared out of that valley anyway.

I had underestimated the value nomads placed on their herds. These buffalo-sized goats were their meat, milk, and clothes. Without them, no one would be alive anyway; so what was the loss of a few Mindymuns in comparison?

Rarnoor led me to his family's tent after the vote, and they welcomed me like a long-lost uncle. I was given meat, milk, and cheese, and invited to share the sleeping robes of one of his young female cousins. In fact I did, but I was too exhausted and heartsick to care if the cousin was male or female. She was a head taller than myself. And I saw by the frozen look on her pretty face, easily readable in the warm firelight, that I had best keep my hands to myself. Besides, I probably smelled bad to her.

Next morning they let me go. I scurried for the valley, making it in one long day's hike. I think the Whites will be close behind me. In the morning I have to think of more ways to help the Golds defend their cold but lovely home. It's going to be a rough battle.

Rarnoor paused, examining the wooden barricade looming ahead. The Golds had erected it at the most narrow point in the pass, where sheer rock walls on both sides made climbing impossible. The simple structure of vertical trunks planted in the ground and lashed together was the height of one warrior standing on another's shoulders. Every fourth timber was cut off an arm's length from the top. Each defender, standing on a walkway lashed to the inside halfway up, could hide behind the remaining three trunks and shoot arrows through the narrow opening.

Most White warriors could put every other stone through one of the openings, but that meant little unless the Gold happened to have his head there at the time. The Whites were going to lose many warriors on this assault.

Rarnoor had never seen such a barricade before. And suddenly he realized the grain-eaters had not designed this one by themselves. The human had aided them. That better brain he claimed he possessed, because so little of it was used for smelling ... perhaps there was truth in his words.

The White senior warriors gathered around the chief, all gesturing and talking at once. The air was still in the late afternoon, and the narrow way was soon a meaningless confusion of odors. Rarnoor kept silent, not only because he was young but to think about the problem. Be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hind the warriors he could see the rest of his people, strung out in an uneven line until they passed from sight around a bend. He could hear the angry screeching of the herd, maddened because they had been stopped where there was almost no grass or water. The tribe was committed; there was no going back. During the day's travel they had felt the first light flurries of snow.

The sun dipped behind the mountains to the rear, and the first shades of night crept swiftly over the pass. Rarnoor had a sudden inspiration; the extreme blackness of full darkness in this pass would make both bows and Long Arms virtually useless. The Golds would still smell the attackers coming, but wild arrows could do little harm ... somehow they had to get over that wall, and then it would be knife to knife in the darkness ... the tent poles! The center poles were long enough to reach from the top of the barricade to the ground, at an angle a warrior could climb ... no, better to place the ends, a little way down from the edge, making them difficult for the defenders to reach ... one man on the ground to hold the end firm and resist efforts to push the top away ... it would work!

The senior warriors and family heads would never listen to a young person such as himself, especially one already crippled and almost useless. Rarnoor looked around, for someone of importance he could convince — and saw his friend the chief of the no-mothers. She was standing just outside the noisy circle of warriors, quietly listening. She could see that her women were going to be needed this day.

Rarnoor edged through the crowd to the wrinkle-faced woman's side. She glanced at him with no interest. Cripples were useless to the tribe. But he planted himself squarely in front of her and with his one good hand made the gesture for I-know-the-way. She stared at him, amazed at such impertinence. And slowly and haltingly, with far too much reliance on words that were seldom used, he got across the idea of climbing tentpoles in the darkness. The first warriors safely on the platform behind the barricade would fight off the Golds trying to push the poles away, until more could climb ... she listened and then walked straight to the woman chief and demanded to be heard.

That was a bloody night! Here in the peace of dawn I'll make my daily entry before catching some sleep; keeping this record has become something of a fetish with me now. My only hope for immortality, perhaps. At times like these I think of my old mother, still alive probably, and our home in the lovely little village of Kyleakin. It's across a narrow arm of the beautiful Sound

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Le Sleat from Kyle-of-Lochalsh, on the Scottish mainland. The boyhood memories come flooding back: the cold blue of the water there, the low mountains brown and sere in the winter, the colorful tourists in the spring and summer ... it all seemed so small and provincial when I left. Now, how little the frenetic glamour and bright lights of the cities — or the shining stars in space — mean to me.

The Whites held off attacking until after dark, as we expected. Having no way of knowing when they would come, I suggested throwing the dry brushwood over the walls as soon as the last light died. When we had a line reaching all the way across, we lit torches and held them at readiness. The attack wasn't long in coming, as our chief expected; the Whites are an impatient lot. A dozen torches, tossed together, produced an instant conflagration.

The athletic herdsmen had no problem leaping over our brushfire, at the cost of a little singeing, and the light was certainly poor, but it was adequate for such close shooting. The bowmen on the walls sent volley after volley singing into the swarming Whites. Warrior after warrior fell or retreated wounded. A few of them made it up their long poles to the top, and an even smaller number actually got over onto the walkway. The four bowmen I had suggested be placed on the ground inside got those, though we lost two men in the knife fights. The Whites seem to give even less thought to personal safety than the Golds. Bad for the individual but good for the tribe, I suppose.

As I had expected, the Whites tried to burn us out with the fire we had so conveniently furnished them. But the newly cut logs were green and slow to burn. Besides, we had pots of water ready on the ground. The men on the catwalk had no problem putting out the burning brush the Whites hastily threw against the wall as they retreated.

The big question, of course, is what happens next. If the Whites change course now, they can expect to lose not only their young animals but most of the old or ill as well, both animals and people. They still outnumber the Golds two to one, but our defenses have proven impregnable.

I see the women of the Golds hauling up more brush and water, as well as food for the men on the catwalk. These people are jubilant, really think they've won. The chief just interrupted to thank me profusely for the advice that held the pass. Building the wall was something they had considered, though my design was new; but planning move and countermove, like darkness and brushfire, wall burning

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and pots of water ready, seems to be a little beyond them.

What will happen here if we do stop the Whites cold? (Shouldn't use that word) too many negative connotations here. And I once thought it cold in Scotland!) I suppose the men will be dispersed, to die on the prairie this winter, and the women and children made slaves of the valley dwellers. It was ever thus. The two races are interfertile, I'm told, but seldom mate because each smells bad to the other. I wonder how they diverged originally into two peoples? Well, not my field. Wilson might know, if he was alive to tell. Or Brackney, our humanoids specialist ... shouldn't think about them. Just one year to endure here, a single bad winter, and then the Neverlander in the fall .. survive, this hour, this day, this season ... but I hate to see so many people die.

Looking down the pass here, I can see activity in the Whites' camp. Yes, they are taking down their tents. Evidently we've convinced them ... no, that's odd, they seem to be gathering under them, as though.... Oh, my God! They're raising the tents on the poles and walking this way, using them for cover! The alarm has sounded and the Golds are swarming to the walls. We hadn't expected this. Our archers can penetrate those tents easily enough, but the thick hide will slow them, and when you can't see your target.... The Whites are quite well hidden, nothing but a wall of goat hide advancing toward us ... arrows are piercing it, but the fabric holds together ... wonder who thought of this? These pheromone users may have more creativity than we thought! They're at the base of the wall now, and it's happened so quickly that all our defenders aren't here yet. They're tearing at the logs! They've cut the tie ropes, are pulling hard on the logs, yanking some of them out of the ground! They've made a breakthrough even as I watch, swarming up on the catwalk now, while others move ahead to hold off the reinforcements rushing up.

I think this is it! I'm reserving the few charges left in my laser until one comes after me.... The Golds are fighting hard, knowing it's all over for them if they can't contain this break, push them back ... to late, too late! And the Whites were so friendly to me, fed me, offered me the young girl ... such savagery now, the blood, the screams, the dying ... no mercy ... the White losses have been heavy. Now I see the women's auxiliary coming through, the mop-up squad ... one is coming at me, crouching in this corner. Can I shoot a woman?

Rarnoor went in with the nomothers as he had been assigned,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not complaining. A one-handed man was no match even for a fighting woman, much less a warrior of the Golds. His left arm wound had scabbed over, but was still very sore. He felt well, though.

It had been difficult to talk the tribal council into advancing under the tents. His idea had finally been accepted, primarily because no one could come up with a better plan. And most were not aware that the idea of attacking after dark, for which the Golds had been well-prepared, had been his suggestion. The no-mother chief had not bothered to give him credit.

He slipped through one of the holes in the wall and saw that many White warriors had fallen on this side; random firing through the tents had gotten only a few. The Golds were in full retreat. Long Arms were whirling and rocks flying for the first time in this battle. The Gold seemed to have run out of arrows, probably wasted hundreds trying to stop the advance of the tents.

A familiar hissing crackle sounded in Rarnoor's ears, followed by a scream of pain. He looked toward the north side of the wall. The human was crouching on the walkway there, his back against the rock. He had just burned the arm off another White, one of the no-mothers. She kneeled on the narrow way, bleeding to death.

The single remaining point of resistance attracted the attention of two warriors on the ground. One started for the nearest ladder, then paused, as though uncertain what to do. The second fitted a stone into his Long Arm.

The wounded woman fainted and fell off the walk, landing on the tramped ground with a sudden thump. The man with the knife swarmed up a ladder and started for the human. He died well before he reached him. And then two rocks sailed through the air, one missing but the other catching the almost-White human on the side of the head. He fell with another thump. A nearby no-mother ran to him and cut his throat.

Rarnoor walked over to the human and stood looking down at him. It was sad, that this small stranger knew so much which the Whites did not. And now that knowledge would go with him to the grave. But he knew he could never have convinced the council that it would be worth it to keep this man alive and learn from him.

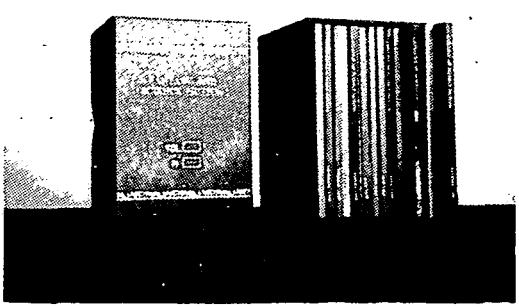
The women of the Whites had arrived and were busily uprooting the log wall, to make room for the frantic, bawling herd to pass. The animals had been without water for two days, and raced down the valley in a wild rush. It did not matter. They could be rounded up for the drive later.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But Rarnoor would not be going with the bulk of his people. A party had to stay here and keep the way open, kill any Gold warriors who returned. He would take a captive Gold woman for his mate, despite her odor, learn to eat grain, and raise his children here. Others old or crippled, who normally died on the drive, could also remain. The able-bodied warriors on duty here would want belly warmers at night, and there was an abundance of Gold widows.... Soon there would be only one people and no more massive killing such as they had just seen.

Rarnoor knew something of the way animals inherited characteristics, from generations of selective breeding for better livestock. He wondered which would prevail in his children, the White control of scents and smell or the Gold ability to use more words.

He hoped his children would grow up speaking well.



Handsome, Sturdy

VOLUME FILES

for Your Copies of

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Each Volume File will keep 12 copies of FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION clean, orderly, and readily accessible. Sturdily built, the files are covered with a rich black and red washable leatherette, and the lettering is in 16-carat gold leaf.
Reasonable priced at $4.95 each, 3 for $14.00 or 6 for $24.00, they are shipped fully postpaid on a money back basis if not satisfactory. Order direct from:

JESSE JONES BOX CORPORATION
Dept. F&SF P.O. Box 5120 Philadelphia, Pa. 19141

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Is there some way you could make the act upbeat?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here is a new, fun-filled adventure of that dauntless missionary for the Southern Primitive Protestant Church, Crispin Mobey. The Reverend is sent on what appears to be a relatively simple mission to help convert the Cajun population of the Louisiana swamp country. As for an explanation of the two broken toes and the encounter with the Undead, you will have to read further.

Be Jubilant My Feet!

by GARY JENNINGS

The Rev. Philander Pilgarlic
Monitor of Domestic Missions
Southern Primitive Protestant
Church
World Headquarters
Abysmuth, Mississippi

Respected Reverend Pilgarlic:

Many thanks for the Get Well card you sent, sir, and for your postscript admonition that I not curtail my period of convalescence out of overeagerness to get back to God's work, i.e., the propagation of Southern Primitive Protestantism. I appreciate your kindly concern that I ought to prolong my recuperation "for months, years, decades if necessary" until I am well and strong enough to report again to World Headquarters for my next evangelical assignment. But, sir, I am suffering only from two broken big toes, and the doctors tell me I shall shortly be the same dauntless and indefatigable Crispin Mobey that I was before the unfortunate contretemps which laid me low. They say it should be not decades but mere weeks until I am again yours (and God's) to command. I am sure that you (and He) will rejoice at this happy prognosis.

Lying here with my feet in traction is no bed of roses, but it is undeniably conducive to philosophical reflection. Every time an inspirational thought occurs to me, I scribble it on one of my plaster casts, if nothing else is handy. I don't pretend that my musings approach the pure poetry and lofty philosophy of, say, an Edgar A. Guest or Ella Wheeler Wilcox. But I will bet that Oral Roberts, say, could hardly do better than this uplifting apothegm, which just now sprang fullblown into my mind:

Of all glad words of tongue
or verse,
The gladdest are these:
It might have been worse.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I suppose a critical reader might dismiss that effort as triflingly wittier than philosophical, but it does bear especial relevance to the lusterless mission from which I have just ingloriously returned. Things *might* have been worse. I could have suffered far more than injured toes and insulted dignity. I could by now be one of The Undead I mentioned in my preliminary report. (I know you angrily deleted from that report all my references to The Walking Dead and suchlike, but I believe this more detailed account of my experiences will convince you, sir, that I report nothing but the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.) Truly, things might have been worse. You might have lost your crusading Crispin Mobey to the powers of darkness.

On the other hand, my mission might have gone better if I had not been (as we old field hands say) "in from the cold" for so long. Not that I mean to complain, Reverend Pilgarlic, but when I was recalled from missionary endeavors, some months earlier, and put to work at routine indoor tasks, well, it *was* somewhat disheartening to one of my active bent and zealous spirit. I was drudging away in the Abysmuth Headquarters mailroom, listlessly addressing Come-to-Christ tracts to the inmates of jails and prisons — what the mailroom clerks irreverently call "our captive audience" — on that very day you sent word for me to report to your office.

"Mobey," you said, when I stood palpitating before your desk, "we had hoped to keep you here at Headquarters, under our thumb— that is to say, under our eye— with a view to steering you into Administration." You paused to breathe a deep sigh. "But we must keep pace with the times, even if it means scraping the bottom of the barrel. Are you aware that the President of the United States is publicly encouraging the recruitment of more and more Protestant missionaries?"

"The *President?*" I exclaimed, unbelieving. "President *Nixon?* But he's a Quaker. Very meek and humble and retiring, those folks. I didn't think they ever proselytized."

Despairingly, it seemed to me, you rubbed a hand over your shiny pate. "Mobey, you *have* been down in that basement cubbyhole too long. There've been a couple of other Presidents inaugurated since that one. The incumbent is not of our church, either. He's a Southern Baptist...."

"Poor soul," I murmured.

"Yes, but still a Protestant. And recently the President pointed out that, while one of every 250 Latter-Day Saints, for instance, is a working missionary, the Southern Baptist Church counts only 250 mis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sionaries all told. He urges his fellow Baptists to get out and convert, convert, *convert!* We Southern Primitive Protestants ask ourselves: can we do less? And we answer: we cannot. We must counter the President's competitive offensive. With whatever foreboding, we are sending out every available missionary, even unto the least of these. Reverend Crispin Mobey, you are back on active field duty as of now."

"Gladly the cross I'll bear," I said, you know not how gladly. "Whence do I bear it, sir?"

You pulled down a wall map, and I was slightly surprised to see that it was not of some place like the South Pacific but of the southern United States.

"We tend to regard our sacred South," you said, "as being all staunchly Protestant, the fortress of all our Fundamentalist faiths, especially of our supreme SoPrim. As you know, the envious call this territory the Bible Belt. Young Mobey, how would you geographically bound the so-called Bible Belt?"

"Well, let's see. I'd say all of the eastern United States south of the Mason-Dixon Line, stopping somewhere in Florida — where the lemons come from. And westward, I guess as far as Southern California — where the nuts come from."

"All that is solidly Fundamentalist Protestant Christian, eh?"

"Right, sir. Solid as rocks, sir."

"Wrong, sir," you said, and I blinked. You tapped one spot on the map. "Not two hundred miles from Abysmuth here, in the very heart of the Bible Belt, lurk some six hundred thousand nonbelievers, crying for conversion to our true faith. Do you see where I am pointing?"

"Well, I'm not very good at map reading," I confessed. "I know that Mississippi and Alabama are the same shape, only flip-flopped, but I never can remember which —"

"Confound it, Mobey, I'm pointing at Louisiana!"

"Louisiana!" I cried. "There are heathens in Louisiana?"

"Papists, my boy," you said darkly. "The Roman Catholic descendants of Roman Catholic Frenchmen who settled first in Canada, in a place they called *Acadie.* When evicted from there — for their sins, no doubt — they emigrated to the swamplands of our Louisiana. But that was two centuries ago, and these Acadiens have yet to become real Americans, let alone Southerners. They scorn the good hardshell Protestant faiths followed elsewhere in Louisiana. They call their counties *parishes.* They superstitiously sprinkle *holy water* on their shrimp boats to insure a good haul. Worse, they refuse to adopt our noble and sancti-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fied Southern customs. Not a single Acadien, I believe, ever owned a slave — ever killed a Yankee in The War or to this day — ever joined the Klan — ever tunes in to any of the South's 2,033 round-the-clock-gospel-radio stations. They even resist learning the American language."

"Er, I'm not very good at speaking French," I confessed.

"No matter. Neither are they, by this time. For example, they have slurred the word Acadiens, and now call themselves Cajuns. We can hope that their Papist convictions have decayed along with their French tongue. I understand the Cajuns are much addicted to drinking, wenching, profanity, loud laughter, dancing and other such abominations."

"All to the good," I mused. "My task of converting them to SoPrim Protestantism will be simpler if I don't have first to wean them away from rigid Romish adherence to the Commandments."

"Yes. Simple hedonists are far easier to manipulate than sophisticated misbelievers. Now, here's our plan for you, Mobey. Fortunately we already have an advance guard living on one of the bayous of the Atchafalaya Swamp, in Kingfish Parish, deep in Cajun country. He is a devout SoPrim layman named Beauregard Stonewall Lee Gooch."

"Clearly not a Louisianian," I interrupted, "but from one of the First Families of my native Virginia. There is a Goochland County in Virginia. It should be there on the map somewhere."

"Quite right, my boy. A pioneering Virginia gentleman who challenged that useless swamp of bayous and quagmires, and successfully carved a vast, wealthy yam plantation out of it. He calls the plantation Bayou-all. Squire Gooch shares our determination to convert the benighted Cajuns by whom he is surrounded. In fact, his telegram urgently and rather amusingly requests that we send 'a troop of missionaries' — as if one godly man were not mightier than a host of the ungodly. Here is your Greyhound ticket, Mobey. You will depart immediately for Bayou-all, and rely on Squire Gooch to effect your infiltration among the Cajuns."

Every other passenger on the Greyhound was, as always, a dowdy and melancholy young woman clutching a wailing infant who drooled at one end and leaked at the other. From Abysmuth, Miss., southwestward, the scenery outside the grimy window was unremarkable: the usual American succession of Dittovilles, identical in their Miracle Mile shopping plazas, McDonald's mansions, Stuckey's praline parlors, Kentucky Fried palaces, and automobile junkyards.

On the other side of Baton

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rouge, La., however, I began to wonder if perhaps you were slightly ill-informed or behind the times, Reverend Pilgarlic. For everywhere I saw the word "Evangeline" on every signboard and could not help fearing that some earlier evangelist had already converted and secured all this region. There is an Evangeline Parish, a town named Evangeline, innumerable Evangeline hotels and honkeytonks, even Evangeline barber shops and shoeshine stands. I was relieved when the surly bus driver sneeringly informed me that the word has nothing at all to do with evangelism. Evangeline, it seems, was the name of a local ethnic heroine — a Cajun Juliet, so to speak — who died of a broken heart when separated from her Cajun Romeo during the migration from Canada to Louisiana.

Late in the afternoon I climbed stiffly down from the bus and stood, noticeably moist and reeking ammoniacally, in the town of St. Martinville — what might be called the Cajuns' "Jamestown Colony." Here is the Bayou Teche dock where the émigrés first landed in "Nouvelle Acadie." In a Catholic churchyard is Evangeline's grave, topped by an exquisite statue of the girl. If female Cajuns are that lovely, I thought to myself, I must beware that they do not distract me from my mission.

"'Vangeline, my coon-ass!" exclaimed a voice, heavy with sarcasm. I turned to see my first Cajun — a Cajun girl, judging from her dress, though she sported a distinct mustache. "Dat statue, her pose' for by a Mexican," said this person. "Mexican actriss name' Dolores del Rio, when she here to mek movie 'bout 'Vangeline. Fifty ago years, dat was."

I was thanking her for this information when another voice said, "Hey, boss, you name' Crispy Mobile?" I turned to see a male Cajun — judging from the fact that he looked even more masculine than the Cajun girl and was smoking a fearsomely pungent Picayune cigarette. He was stoat-faced and small of stature, but all leathery, muscle-bound knobs and gnarls, like a bonsai tree or a lady golfer. "I hab de pleasure t' be Narcisse Loupgarou, me. Call me Sis." (I soon learned that while the Cajun men bear classically hifalutin French names — Euphémon, Celestin, etc. — they are invariably known by their nicknames, which approach the abysm of saccharine Southern folksiness: Junior, Bubba, etc.)

"I woik fo' M'sieu Gooch, me," the wiry gnome explained. "He send me fo' t' fetch you, cuz de plantation she in de *flottants,* not on no pave. You wanna pass on, boss, we go my pirogue."

This made no sense to me, until

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sis led me to the bayou dock at the foot of East Port Street. Then I realized what he had meant: that there was no road ("pave") to Bayou-all, deep in the swamps ("flottants") and, if I wanted to get there ("pass on" not meaning to die), we should have to go by boat ("pirogue"). I *guess* you can call this Cajun contrivance a boat. A scooped-out tree trunk, the pirogue is some fifteen feet long, but only slightly wider and deeper than a ski. "She float on a hebby dew," Sis reassured me, as he stowed me in the prow, my valise amidships and himself in the stern to paddle. We glided out onto the black waters and turned south. In a very short time, St. Martinville was behind us — so was all of civilization — and we were steering sinuously through the narrow, twisting waterways of the flottants of the 'Chaf-falaya, as it is (locally) pronounced.

This is the forest primeval. In the twilight, the living oaks on either bank bulked green-black and menacing, while the dead ones shone bone-white like skeletons brooding over us passersby, and the Spanish moss beards, draping live and dead trees alike, gleamed an eerie glowworm green-white. Interspersed among the oaks and encroaching even on the bayous were the unlovely bald cypress trees, lifting the naked knobbly knees of their roots as if marching in slow motion into the water. The ghostly, goose-pimply ambience was not improved by Sis's singing, in a gloomy baritone, what I took to be a local folk-ditty:

> "Hark, f'm de tomb a doleful sound — A libbing ghoul come f'm de ground!"

As the twilight deepened, clouds of mosquitoes and gnats enveloped and tormented me. I tried to discourage the pests by scooping up and sloshing bayou water on myself, but desisted when Sis remarked that the water was full of worse things: snapping turtles, alligators and cottonmouth moccasins. I began to dislike the Atchafalaya — but in time I would learn to loathe it.

Cajuns must have cat eyes; Sis Loupgarou kept paddling throughout the night. I was weary enough, after that dreary Greyhound ride, to sleep even in my cramped crouch in the pirogue. But I was prevented, partly by the certainty that I should fall out of the boat and fall prey to the reptiles, partly by the damp chill that kept me shivering too briskly to close my eyes. I had always been under the impression that southern Louisiana is a tropic land, but, with the night, a miasmic fog rose from the slimy water and ate through clothing and flesh until it was bone deep. When I could endure the ache no longer, I suggested

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to Sis that we pause for a hot-coffee break.

"I don' bring no coffee, me," he grunted. "Anyhow, ain' none dis wood here'bouts dry nuff to mek us a fire."

"I've got coffee," I said through chattering teeth and held up my vacuum flask. "I had this thermos filled in Baton Rouge. It will still be hot."

He evidently did not believe me, for when he stopped to steady the boat against a midstream hummock and I handed him a plastic cupful, he said in astonishment, "Pee-poor Yankee coffee, but damfit *ain'* hot! Allaway f'm Baton Rouge, you say? Boss, how dis t'oimos woik, *hein?*"

I myself have no idea, so I explained as simply as to a child, "Well, a thermos bottle keeps hot things hot and cold things cold."

"Do tell," he said admiringly, and then, after several pensive minutes of silence, "Boss, how do a bottle know de *differments?*"

He had me there. But, I reflected, if these Cajuns were ignorant of the workings of something as simple as a vacuum flask, they should certainly be fertile ground for instruction in the rudiments of So-Prim Protestantism. For the moment, however, I merely changed the subject. I had been wondering whether it was mannerly to say "Cajun" to a Cajun. Would he perhaps prefer a carefully enunciated "Acadien?" I asked Sis Loupgarou.

He shrugged and said, "Most times we call ourselfs coon-ass."

I am only using such a word herein, Reverend Pilgarlic, when I am reporting verbatim. (I did not, you may be sure, inquire into the origin or exact meaning of "coon-ass.") I am also trying to render the Cajun speech as well as I can in writing. You were right about their French, sir; it is only seldom that they employ a French word or phrase. But their English dialect — don't ask me why — sounds like an amalgam of stage-Negro and stage-Brooklynese.

Just after dawn we landed at another dock. Rising from it was an impressive expanse of bluegrass lawn, dotted with plaster white peacocks and plaster black pickaninnies holding hitching rings. Crowning the sweep of lawn was the gleaming white Great House of Bayou-all, a true Selznick Southern mansion — gable-roofed, two-storied, Doric-columned — set among its outbuildings: a detached kitchen, dairy barn, stables, etc. As I, muzzy from sleeplessness, stumbled up the bluegrass, a burly, white-haired gentleman came down to meet me, a tall frosted glass in his hand.

Before greeting me, he bellowed at the Cajun, "You tuk long nuff t' git cheer! Haul yo' coon-'ass out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

char and git the lead o' them yam diggers!" Sis Loupgarou appeared to snarl silently, like a wolf, but tugged at his greasy forelock and slunk away.

"Squire Gooch, sir?" I said, as brightly as I was able. "I am Crispin Mobey, from SoPrim World Headquarters."

"Wal, you look a rat puny specimen," he said jovially. "But, then, so did Billy the Kid, eh? Hyuk-hyuk. We got plenty o' wuck fo' you-all t' do, son. Jine me in a mint julep?"

I am ordinarily partial to fruit soda pop — and mint flavor was a new one to me — but not for breakfast. I declined politely and added, "It's a delightful place you have here, sir. I especially like the name of it."

"Hah! Got it rat off, didja?" He gave a coarse laugh. "Thumbing m' nose at them bassets what run me out o' Goochland, twenny years back. Bye, you-all, tha's what I say."

"Er — dogs ran you out of Virginia?" I asked, still fuddled. "And you a First Family?"

"Yes, suh! Me an F.F.V.—not t' mention the K.K.K., the N.R.A., and the John Birch. Allus vote fo' Jawge Wallace and Lester Maddox and Anita Bryant even when none of 'em ain' running fo' nothing. But the rest o' Virginny, tha's done gone t' the dawgs, as you so ratly put it. Niggers all uppity and the whites all sissy Rotarians selling insurance t' each other. Din jist run me out — rode me out on a rail. So out o' spite I named m' new place Bayou-all. Mare fack, I wanted t' call it Effyou-all, but the Kingfish Parish Surveyor refused t' register that, and m' genteel missus dint care fo' it, so...."

Sleepy and dopey though I was, I had begun to discern an Afro-American in the woodpile, as the saying goes — and to feel a sudden distaste for Squire Gooch — and to suspect that somehow he had earned his exile here among the reptiles and Roman Catholics.

"Yar comes m' missus now, and ow nubile maiden dotter. The lights o' m' life. Bea, m' dear, thisyer is Mister Moping Flimsy."

"Crispin Mobey," I said. She was considerably younger than the squire, of glacial mien but glazed-porcelain beauty. "A pleasure, Squiress Gooch. I mean Squireperson. I mean ma'am."

"Likewise," said Bea Gooch, dropping a curtsey. "And this is our pride and joy, Cloaca. I perceive your surprise, suh, that she bears no euphonious old Virginia name like Laura Lou or Lula Lee. But she was born just after we settled here in the Atchafalaya, so we named her after that old song. You know, 'Through the dismal swampland ... Nightshades falling, hear

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him cry ... *Cloaca!* ... I gotta go where you are....'"

"Er, I thought..." I said hesitantly. "That is, I had remembered the name as ... well, never mind. Pleased to meet you, Miss Gooch."

The maiden, who bore an extraordinary resemblance to a one-time comic strip character named Olive Oyl, giggled and said flirtatiously, "Oh, sugah, *do* call me Cloaca."

"He kin call you sweetheart, if'n he wants to," said her father, and I winced. "But rat now him and me got some man-talking t' do. Y'all git t' yo' needlepoint. Cmawn, boy."

In the noticeably bookless library of the Great House, Squire Gooch launched immediately into his briefing.

"Ev'y Cajun f'm Bayou-all t' the Delta has got his hand raised aginst me, jist cuz I'm a Wasp," he began. "I'm whiter'n any o' the li'l frogs, and I'm anglier and sexier, and I'm a Protestant. Nevuh bin able t' git a decent day's wuk out o' any of 'em. As fo' respeck—I've had mo' respeck from ow darkies back home. But *now* they've riled up thar priests aginst me, and thar priestesses. Called *houngans* here'bouts."

"Priestesses!" I blurted, startled almost awake. "The wretches have strayed indeed. Surely their bishop hasn't ordained these women?"

"Hail, I don' know." He waved that away. "They's one old shehoungan they call Granny Guignol. Holds sarvices reg'lar, whar they all drink a mixture o' human blood and —"

"I think you mean Communion wine, sir," I ventured.

"Blood! Human blood, gunpowder, rum and graveyard dust! Tha's what they drink, and they walk around backwards;, and they raise a toast t' the damnation of Beauregard Stonewall Lee Gooch."

"Come, sir, I fear you are overwrought. I know their rituals are repellent to a Protestant, but obviously you have mistaken some Latin prayer —"

"Latin sheet!" he said irrelevantly. "They bin driving brass nails in all the trees and fence posts around my bound'ry line. They all wears charms on strings around thar necks."

"St. Christopher medals," I said, with an indulgent smile. "These backwoods yokels evidently haven't heard that the Church has discredited St. Chris —"

"Medals with hair on 'em? Medals that wiggle and snicker? I tell you they out t' do me in! I caught my cook, Moon Gilderais, trying t' sarve me cat soup at supper one night. Natcherly, I pulled a pistol and shot the coon-ass. But m' hand was shaking so, I no more'n blistered him, and he got clean away. Now I dasn't have a Cajun

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

indoor sarvint. All m' house darkies now are Cubans run way f'm Castro."

"You shot your cook," I said weakly, "for serving catsup?"

"Cat soup, I said, and I mean cat soup! That's s'posed t' conjure a snake inside a body's body — don' axe me how. But the coon-asses b'lieve the snake grows and eats on yo' innards till you dwindle away and die."

I shook my head sadly. "Then the poor souls have backslid further than I could have believed possible. This surpasses every blasphemy and iniquity that has ever before come out of Rome."

"Out o' Rome? You puddin'-haid, this comes out o' Africa!" I looked at him blankly. "It was a sarpint worship over yonder, called *vodu.* The slaves brung it t' Haiti, t' the Car'linas, t' Nawleans. Differnt places, differnt times, it's bin called Voodoo, Hoodoo, Obeah, Myal. Now that the Cajuns have done tuk it up, they prefer the name of Obeah. But we'll show 'em, won't we, boy?" He strode to the window and looked down toward the empty dock. "When do yo' men and munitions git cheer?"

"A SoPrim missionary works alone," I told him. "Unless of course he's got a wife and family. I happen to be unmarried."

Squire Gooch turned to stare at me. He also turned several vivid colors, and his eyeballs bulged.

"Here I go and telegraph fo' a troop o' mercenaries," he said in a quiet and wondering but awful voice. "And they send me a missionary. One ninety-sem pound missionary."

"Maybe," I said hastily, "there's been a bit of misunderstanding on both sides."

"Hail," said Squire Gooch, still as if communing with himself. "I seen that movie *The Excerciss.* So I guv the coon-asses a chanct. I went t' the real parish priest here'bouts, Père Blancmange, and axed him t' exercise the mothers. But he's a cowardy-custard. Shooed me away. So, sez I, I'll call in some good ole Protestant boys with some good ole guns. And they send me this."

"Sir, they sent me to convert these unhappily deluded Cajuns, not to wipe them out."

"You?" he said contemptuously. "Even if you could, how long'll it take? And all the time, s'pose I got this yer snake o' Granny Guignol's a-growing inside o' me...."

I downright snapped at him, "Now stop that! The one thing we must never do is to fall into the same delusions we're trying to eradicate. Squire Gooch, I may look unprepossessing at first sight. But I am merely fatigued. I have been traveling hard for twenty-four hours without sleep. Let me but grab a few hours' rest and you'll see a dif-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ferent man. I'll bring these poor souls to Christ if it kills them. I mean if it kills me."

Perhaps my peremptory tone put some stiffening into his backbone. The master of Bayou-all muttered something about "wouldn' b'lieve things could git wuss," and called a Cuban manservant to show me to an upstairs room. Without even stopping to wash up, I shucked my black serge and fell inert across the downy bed. But before I was fully unconscious, I heard someone afar off — it sounded like a woman — singing, almost triumphantly:

> "The devil he's a liar and a conjurer too—If you don't look out, he'll conjure you!"

I came downstairs again about sunset, bathed and changed and looking more like the man of grit that I am. Squire Gooch somewhat less than cordially invited me to join the family at supper, which featured a dish called "gumbo." (The Cajuns used the word gumbo both for this ethnic stew and for any thick, gluey mud, possibly because they are indistinguishable.) Over the meal, the squire announced that, persuaded by wife Bea and daughter Cloaca, he had decided to give me one try at besting the Cajuns' Obeah in my own Christian way, before himself resorting to any un-Christian violence.

"One chanct, Revren, and you kin commence this very night. It so happens that the local Cajuns are holding a *fais-dodo* down the bayou tonight, and you kin at least start sizing 'em up."

"They're holding a what?"

"A fais-dodo is a Cajun ball," said Mrs. Gooch, smiling. "In their dialect, fais-dodo means 'to go to sleep,' but I don't believe you'll find it soporific, suh. They call it that because they usually bring their children and it's usually an all-night affair, so they tuck the wee ones to sleep under the benches around the walls."

"You will esco't Cloaca," said Squire Gooch. I flinched; the maiden smirked. "She'll be yo' 'covuh' so nobody'll suspicion yo' intentions. My man Sis will drive y'all t' the dance in ow swawmp tractuh, and I've commanded the li'l coon-ass t' introduce you around."

The swamp tractor turned out to be a shallow-draft skiff with an airplane engine and propeller mounted aft. Sis Loupgarou, who seemed habitually to slink and cringe while at Bayou-all, threw off that demeanor entirely when he took the controls, and joyously bawled louder than the engine:

> "Cajun mighty happy when
> he guzzle at de cawn.
> Cajun mighty happy when
> he hear de dinner hawn,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But he mighty mo' happy
when de night come on!"

Cloaca and I, up front, conversed in quieter tones as we skimmed lightly over the black waters. Somehow, though born and reared in the midst of Cajuns in the shadow of her uncouth father, she had managed to acquire a Virginia accent of the utmost elegance. For example, she described herself as "a real romantic Southern Baal" — or at least an aspiring one, because she sadly lacked for "a string of beaux." She complained that every time she located an unattached male (of her faith) he fell hopelessly in love with her momma, who was "evuh so much prettiuh." I made insincere but gallant demurrers at that and instantly wished I hadn't, when she confided that she was "evuh so thrilled" to hear from daddy that *I* was an unattached So-Prim male.

The fais-dodo was in full swing when we got there. It was held in a cotton warehouse temporarily empty of bales, though a few white tufts drifted around the plank floor among the dancers' feet. So did something else, according to Sis:

"We allus sprunkle hot cayenne pepper on de flo'. Gits up de goils' skoits an' *hot* diggity dawg! It take two t' scratch dat itch!"

I assume he meant that it made the dancing livlier. At any rate, the dances — unfamiliar to me; traditional Cajun, I presume — seemed lively enough. The men and women were cavorting to the music of fiddle, concertina and juice-harp, occasionally accompanied by a clearly tipsy basso profundo caroling, *"Dansez, mes enfants, tandis que vous êtes jeunes!"* All danced, and laughed, and were happy, and seemed to glory in these sins.

Even if I had not been wearing my Earth Shoes (as always, in hope of improving my posture), I am not very good at dancing. This did not discourage Cloaca from demanding that we join in almost every set. Fortunately she was extremely bowlegged or she would have been too tall for me. Now and then I was whirled away by a Cajuness, though the same one never came back for a repeat performance. None of these was a Dolores del Río, but all were appreciably handsomer than the St. Martinville girl (not to mention my Olive Oyl).

At intervals between dances, Sis Loupgarou would, as commanded by mine host, haul me off to introduce me to one or another of the men present — Junior Desade, Bubba Barbleu, Moon Gilderais, I don't remember all their names. These introductions took place outside the dance hall, where various kegs were set up on sawhorse cradles. The Cajuns were imbibing something called "cawn," which I perceived, just from its aroma, to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be some ardent spirit, and so declined to partake. However, not wishing to appear a total churl, I did accept several gourds of persimmon beer over the course of the evening. This I take to be on the order of root beer, a soft beverage for the ladies present. The first sip of it puckered my mouth to a buttonhole, but succeeding drafts went down more smoothly, and I even joined in the Cajuns' toast of *"A bas la bête Gooch!"* — evidently a salute to mine host.

But I now suspect that something sinister was slipped into my persimmon juice — not a cat, I devoutly hope — for, as the evening went on, my head began to swim, my senses began to play me tricks, and (I blush) even my SoPrim inhibitions began to unravel. I have a vague recollection of doing a solo dance for the admiration of the assemblage, rocking about on my Earth Shoes and finally falling down amongst the babies asleep against the wall, causing some loud consternation among them and their mothers as well.

Sis or Moon or Junior or Bubba or somebody sidled up to me and whispered, "Gran'mere Guignol puttin' on a show out dere on Dead Man Bayou." He waved imprecisely. "You wanna see Obeah, hein?"

Despite the Obeah drug or whatever it was, I retained sense enough to say no. "Gent'man can't abandon his lady fair," I said, my speech nearly as thick as a Cajun's. "Gotta stay with Miss Gooch."

"Merde, dat one don' need no chaperone," said whoever it was, as I staggered and rocked away in search of Cloaca, remembering that I had not seen her since my spectacular solo.

Nor could I find her now, and I looked everywhere. After colliding painfully with numerous dancing couples, I prudently got down on my hands and knees to search, though the red pepper on the floor sent me into spasms of sneezing. After numerous dancing couples had tripped over me and fallen heavily, I moved off to search the sidelines. No Cloaca. Getting quite panicky now, I feverishly tossed out of my way baby baskets, swaddling clothes and perhaps even their infant contents. When I was picked up bodily by a swoop of mothers and violently pitched out the door, the cool night air revived me to some degree.

No drug or enchantment can ever entirely muddle the monolithic Mobey mind. I realized at once what had happened. Cloaca Gooch had been kidnapped and dragged to the Obeah witch's coven, perhaps as bait to lure me there, perhaps for purposes even more unspeakable. I tried to calculate the direction that whispering Cajun had indicated, then lurched off, be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it wrong or right, through the depths of night, calling, "Cloaca!" Through the dismal swampland, calling, "There's no chains can bind you! If you live I'll find you! Cloaca!" Splashing through muck and mire, bashing against trees, thrashing through lianas, forever calling, no reply: "Cloaca!"

"All I want in whole creation
Is purty li'l wife and big plantation!"

That wasn't me. That was another voice, singing in the distance. I made for it and finally saw a wavery red light glowing through the tangled trees and undergrowth. As I cautiously slowed and crept closer, the light became firelight in a clearing in the swamp. A number of Cajun men and women, very dishiveled and obviously intoxicated, were dancing about the fire, and dancing backward. Their only music was a single fiddle, but its horsehair bow rasping on catgut strings made a noise like that of horse and cat being skinned alive. The raucous singing went on:

"Now Obeah fires are smoking,
Now his limbs grow cold.
It's good t' know ole Massa's croaking
Cuz he's got so weak and old!"

Now I discerned that the people were jigging around a muddy concavity in the ground. And at the farther rim of it sat a creature that could only be Granny Guignol. She was bundled shapelessly in shawls, and an immense water moccasin was draped over her shoulders. Her eyes, reflecting the fire, blazed red from a pale face creased by an infinitude of wrinkles. Her snarled hair was the color and kinkiness of Spanish moss. Indeed, as I peered more narrowly, I could tell it was a wig of real Spanish moss. Drug-dazed though I may still have been, I realized that, however old the hag truly was, she had cleverly employed make-up to appear a hundred years older. I also realized that all this to-do was intended as an incantation against Squire Beauregard Stonewall Lee Gooch.

The she-houngan suddenly raised her arms, the snake twining about them, and shrieked, "Zumbee!" The rest of the crowd stopped dancing, stood still, vigorously stamped their feet in place and chanted, louder and louder, "Zumbee! Obeah Zumbee! Gumbo Zumbee!" My flesh crawled and my back hair prickled. I don't know much about Obeah or Voodoo or whatever, but I *have* read of the zombie (as it is usually spelled): the dead man brought to a sort of half life. The Undead, summoned from the grave to walk abroad at the houngan's command. A thing without mind or will, helplessly obeying

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the houngan's bidding to do things vile and evil. Now, in a surprisingly clear voice, Granny Guignol was singing a couplet I had heard before:

"Hark, from the tomb a doleful sound — a living ghoul comes from the ground!"

Could my senses still be tricking me? I would swear that the pit of gumbo mud before her began sluggishly to stir. Like a cauldron of tar on the boil, it reluctantly yielded a couple of fat bubbles that burst with a viscous lip-smacking sound and emitted a fetid stench. As the chant increased to a roar — "Zumbee! Gumbo Zumbee!" — the mud heaved and began to raise up in a bulge....

I confess that I hesitated. If I broke in and broke the spell, might not the hag turn her wrath on me? Might she not have the power to enchant the vivacious, intelligent, talented Crispin Mobey into one of her vacant-eyed, witless and soulless Walking Dead? But, thank God, God was with me. I thought: a man has called for rescue, and (however loathsome I personally find the man) Crispin Mobey is the only rescuer at hand. I lunged into the firelight, shouting:

"Desist, good people! This is a blasphemy and an abomination!"

The bulging mud puddle subsided with a plop. The chanting gave way to a concerted animal growl, and a battery of red eyes turned on me. "Dat s'rimp dere done disconjure de zumbee!" The throng began to close in ominously. Very well, this was war, the godly versus the ungodly. I quickly snatched at the most warlike Christian weapon I know, *The Battle-Hymn of the Republic,* and sang it at the top of my lungs:

"He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat...
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant my feet!"

My feet had other ideas. Yea, the spirit may be strong, but the flesh is weak. As the enraged Cajuns stooped to pick up even more warlike weapons—sticks and stones — my feet bore me hastily out of the firelit clearing and at a good pace into the bordering forest.

Funny, though: I glimpsed one thing before I fled. While the faces of all the other Obea-worshippers were contorted with fury, the inscrutable face of Granny Guignol threw me only a gruesome wink, boding no good will. Her eyelid didn't move, but a dull translucent film slid *upward* across her eyeball. This film is called the nictitating membrane, and humans don't have such a thing. Only some of the lower animals do — most notably the snakes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Meditating on this curiosity, I plunged heedlessly through thorns and thickets in my flight — through alligators and cottonmouths, for all I know. At one point, I did step on something soft and moving. A soprano voice said, "Ow!" and a baritone voice said "Merde!" When I paused to apologize, the soprano voice gave a squeak, as of dismay. Then a naked human form rose swiftly and bounded away. I got only a fleeting look, and of course it is difficult to determine the gender of a person unclad, but I recognized the bow legs.

I had no time to meditate on this; the baying pack was on my heels. I ran on again, but not far. I was soon slowed by a sort of slush, ankle deep. I slogged forward, and the slush became bog, knee deep. I struggled on, but finally had to stop, when the bog became ooze, slurping hungrily up to my waist. I tell you, Reverend Pilgarlic, I could almost have said a bad word. I had run right into a quicksand.

I remembered an old film I had seen on the Late Late Show, called *Swamp Water,* and I knew that the quicksand would slowly but implacably suck me down until only my hat was left floating to mark my miserable grave. But I wore no hat. Only my spectacles would remain, their prescription lenses staring blankly upward into the uncaring black Atchafalaya night.

Now eerie lights came palely flickering about me, and I thought, "Will-o'the-wisps. I am to be haunted to the last." But the lights were lanterns, and they were carried not by my Obeah-maddened pursuers but by a rather friendlier and more sober bunch, led by Sis Loupgarou. He directed the salvage operation, which consisted of a noose being thrown around my upper body and tightened to encircle me under my armpits. When the rope was tugged, I felt that I was being stretched to breaking point, and I said so, loudly.

"It's de shoes allus hold a body down," Sis called. "Revren, kin you untie yo' shoestrings?"

"Not without going all the way under," I gasped.

"Okay, we jist hab to pull de mo' harder boys. Pull! He come right out dem shoes."

In agony, I tried to shout that I was wearing stout Earth Shoes, and that they slope the opposite way from the ordinary. But then my toes went "snap, crackle, pop," and I think I shouted something else.

I was carried, shoeless and whimpering, to the swamp tractor. Cloaca Gooch was already aboard (and fully dressed). She cooed solicitously over my fast-swelling big toes until Sis started up the engine, then took advantage of its racket to whisper mischievously, "You won't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tattle on li'l ole me, sugah?" I hurt too much to say anything, but gave her a simultaneously reproving and forgiving look. We three skimmed away without more conversation — Sis didn't even sing — to reach Bayou-all in another dawn.

The rest was anticlimax. Or maybe it wasn't.

"You had yo' chanct, Revren," growled Squire Gooch, "and you sho' as hail goofed it."

("You sho' as hail did, sugah," Cloaca Gooch murmured in my ear, then skipped giggling out of the room. I virtuously ignored her.)

The squire's voice carried more of despair than of scorn or scolding. He appeared to have fallen into decrepitude in just the time we had been gone. His shoulders stooped, his formerly burly frame seemed gaunt, his bleary eyes darted about like those of a hunted man. Something plainly was eating him.

"If'n m' own church cain' he'p, I dunno whar I'll turn," he mumbled defeatedly. "Mebbe one o' them sneaky underworld gangs ' the Mafia, the Nosa Costra, the FBI. Gotta think on it."

"I'm sure the Reverend Mobey did his best," said Bea Gooch, and gave me a warm wink of confidence behind her husband's back.

"Wal, ain' nothing *we* kin do fo' them *toes* of his'n," grumbled the squire. "They need setting by a doc. I'll have m' man Sis run you back down t' St. Martinville, boy, whar thar's a horspital."

The hospital, as I might have expected, is a Roman Catholic institution, but well-equipped and well-run. I admit that the nursing sisters, gliding through the halls with their long black habits sweeping the floors (can this be hygienic?) are disturbingly reminiscent of ghosts. And the Abbé-Administrator's hourly call from the loudspeakers in every corner — "We will now recite the prayer for the dead. Obbly-gobbly-(incomprehensible Latin)-yackety-yawmp" — is scarcely consoling or inspiriting to folk lying in sickbeds.

But being immured here, as I have said, gives me opportunity for reflection. I have come to fear that Squire Gooch is beyond the help of myself or SoPrim or any other godly agency — and perhaps is already lost and gone forever. There exists a malevolence at Bayou-all, apart from the squire's own mean vulgarity and apart from the bogus Obeah. When Squire Gooch has been consumed by that other evil, I predict that the trumped-up Obeah cult will vanish as quickly as it was organized.

Obeah aside, if World Headquarters still wants me to convert the Cajuns from Papistry to SoPrim Protestantism, I am willing to return to the fray. But I deem it a bootless task, Reverend Pilgarlic.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Those excitable, flighty, inflammable people can hardly be too highly regarded even by Rome, and I doubt very much that SoPrim would want to count them among its devotees. At the start of this letter, I quoted my own opinion of this aborted mission:

> Of all glad words of tongue or verse,
> The gladdest are these:
> It might have been worse.

And something worse indeed lives on in the Atchafalaya. This other infernal horror may well outlast both Obeah and Catholicism there, but I respectfully, firmly decline to tilt against it again.

What that malevolent spirit is, and what introduced Obeah to that region, I might have guessed at the very moment of my arrival at Bayou-all, when I first heard the repulsive name that had been foisted on the Gooch daughter. Or again when the wretched daughter explained why she could never keep a "beau" — and so had degraded herself to wanton promiscuity. I also realize, now, that the family cook could hardly have served up a nauseous cat soup to the squire without serving it to all at table, but it was intended for Squire Gooch alone. I cannot forget that the Bible says, "A man's enemies will be those of his own household." Above all, I cannot forget the two identical nictitating winks winked at me by (ostensibly) two different women.

If she is not already a merry widow and the mistress and sole owner of the wealth of Bayou-all, she soon will be. Bea. Obeah.

Obediently,
Crispin Mobey

Coming Soon

Next month: The feature novella is one of the most unusual and gripping time travel stories we have ever read. Its title is "Palely Loitering," and the author is Christopher Priest, who wrote "The Watched" in our April 1978 issue. Also, new stories by William Rotsler, Stephen Donaldson and others.

Soon: "On Wings of Song," a new novel by Thomas M. Disch, the longest and very possibly the best novel F&SF has ever serialized. More on this next month.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Although only an occasional contributor to the sf field, Ray Russell has been a professional writer for almost 25 years, with stories in Playboy, Ellery Queen, Paris Review *and many others. His most recent novel was a bestseller (a fantasy) titled INCUBUS.*

The Humanic Complex

by RAY RUSSELL

Buon giorno. It's an absolutely *super* morning. I'll bet you wouldn't say no to a nice hot cup of tea, eh, dearie? Coffee? Righty-o, I'll join you. Prosit! Down the hatch! Yum sing! Ah, that hits the spot, it do. Now, then, permit me to introduce myself. My name is Sally-bill, and I'm here to offer you three wishes. No, you're not dreaming — I'll pinch you, see? Give me a listen. In my century, we've achieved a lot of achievements. Most of them you wouldn't even *understand* if I told you about them — I don't understand half of them my *own* self! But some of them are fairly simple, and even a primitive like you (no offense) can probably grasp them. For instance, airlove and bloodsongs and skycandy, stuff like that. Well, one of the newer wrinkles is this wish shtick. I don't think you chaps had it in this timezone. The way it works is like this. Anybody of third-level status or above, who's passed the 920 exams and doesn't have any bluejacks on his/her record, can grant three wishes to anyone, *provided* that the granting is done in a timezone prior to the grantor's birth. Grantor, c'est moi. Don't ask me why it has to be that way — some technicality about spacetime continuum stress factors. Needless to say, we cracked the time barrier *long* ago. So anyhoo, since I passed my 920's with flying colors yesterday—well, of course, it wasn't really yesterday, it—was ist los, ma'am?

You're sitting on my foot. And that's sir, not ma'am.

Sorry, is that better—sir? This old fixed-gender stuff always throws me. Can we get on with the wishes, do you think? I'd really like to be shlepping back to my own zone.

Can I go to the bathroom first?

Copyright © 1978 by Ray Russell

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The whatroom?

Bathroom.

¿Porqué?

Well, it's rather indelicate, but, not to put too fine a point on it, I want to empty my bladder.

Done and done. Your bladder's empty.

Amazing! It really is empty. How did you do that?

Elementary interdimensional portation. Kid stuff. Now, how's about your second wish?

What? You mean that bladder trick was my first wish???

Natürlich.

But I could have done that myself!

Not to worry, old bean. You still have two more to go. Make the most of 'em, wot? Eh? Eh?

Yes, but I wish I knew —

Cave quid dicis! Don't say I Wish or I Want unless you mean it.

May I ask a question?

Be my guest.

Can I wish for anything? Anything at all?

Absotively.

And I'll get it?

Posilutely.

Then I wish for three thousand wishes instead of just three.

Nyet, that's out.

But you said anything.

Anything but that. Stress factors again.

Oh, all right. I wish I could live for —

Durak! Were you going to wish for immortality?

Yes — but I suppose that's out, too?

No, it's allowable. But take my advice. In your case, that would be a wasted wish. Besides, some of my best friends are immies, look you, and they are very unhappy people, whatever.

I'll take your word for it. Then I wish for a billion —

Trust me. Don't ask for money.

Why not?

Shure, an' you wouldn't be knowin' what to do with it at all.

—Oh, yes, I would!

You only think you would. Besides, without going into a whole song and dance, just believe that you wouldn't *believe* what's going to happen to money. Stay away from money.

If you say so. Let's see. Then I wish to possess that which all the sages, in vain, have —

Cool it, man. Infinite wisdom, right? Hey, you don't need any more wisdom than you already got. And some of my best buddies are wizzies, and they're real downbeat dudes, you dig?

You're certainly making it difficult. And you're sitting on my other foot now.

Excusez-moi. Try again.

Give me some time.

Och, mon, take a wee minute, but nae mair.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I can't think of anything else!

What about sex? That's a big deal back here in this zone, ain't it? How about I fix it so all the sexiest guys in the world —

Women, women.

— Women, right, sorry, all the most beautiful, desirable women in the whole world become unable to resist your charms? Pardee, hit oghte thee to lyke.

The only trouble is, I'm not all that interested in sex. It's fine for others, I'm no prude, but it's just not my sort of thing. I mean, as a steady diet. Once in a while, all right, but that's all.

I had a feeling you might say that. Want to pack it in?

No, no! ... wait ... I've got it....

Are you sure?

I am. This may sound pompous, but ... I wish to know whether or not there is a God.

Yes, there is. Last wish.

For my last wish: I wish to see His face.

Done and done. Get up and look in the mirror.

When I climbed out of bed and peered into the mirror that hung on the wall on the opposite side of the room, I saw a face I did not know. A stranger, not young or old, handsome or ugly. I blinked and rubbed that face with my hands; then I turned to Sallybill, who continued to perch at the foot of my bed. I asked, "Who am I?"

"I just told you, gospodin," Sallybill replied.

I smiled indulgently. "Yes, very amusing. But now tell me the truth, please."

"Truth? Mamma mia, that's a tall order! John, 18:38 — jesting Pilate and all that. Even if we could agree as to what Truth is, Truth with a capital T, why should I necessarily be a repository of it? And even if I am, why should I tell you? That's for me to know and you to find out, to coin a phrase."

"Stop playing games," I said sternly. "I wish to know—"

"Your wishes are all kaput."

"But I can ask questions, can't I?"

"Fire away, Mungu."

I sat down on the head of the bed — there was no other furniture in the room. "You claim to be from what you call another timezone." Sallybill nodded wearily. "What year?"

"Year Purple, Cycle Epsilon-Ten."

I groaned. "What century?"

"Fifteenth," said Sallybill. "A. D. D. In other words, the fifteenth century after the Dark Dawn. Does that help you, filos?"

"No."

"I didn't think it would. Alors—" Sallybill hopped off the bed. "I'll e a-moseyin' on back t my own spread, I reckon."

"Wait!" I held out my hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Another question."

Sallybill sighed. "Let's hear it."

"What year is *this?*" I asked.

"You don't know?"

"I don't even know my own name!"

"I can't help you out on the year thing. Back here in this zone, they have a cockamamie way of naming the years."

"All right," I said, "then tell me, what's the name of this planet?"

"What planet?"

"The planet we're *on.*"

"What makes you so sure we're on a planet?"

"I'll put it another way. In your own timezone, do you live on a planet?"

Contemptuously, Sallybill snarled, "Art addlepated, sirrah? Fie, oh, fie! Think you like angels in the Heav'ns we fly?"

"Good enough. Now what's the name of *that* planet?"

"We call it The World."

"Every planet is a world!"

Sallybill eloquently shrugged. "So sue me."

I tried another tactic. "How many planets in your solar system? And which one is yours, in order of distance from the sun?"

Sallybill frowned, obviously puzzled. "We is de *onliest* planet around de sun."

"I see..."

Sallybill added, "They say there *used* to be other planets around our sun, but something happened to them."

"What exactly?"

"¿Quién sabe?"

After a moment, I said, calmly and smoothly, "Shall I tell you what I think?"

"Thought you'd never ask."

"I think this is a mental institution," I said. "I'm here because I've lost my memory. And you're another patient, who escaped from a padded cell, slipped into my room and woke me out of a sound sleep to entangle me in this deranged conversation."

"Takes one to know one," Sallybill said with a giggle.

"Or," I continued, for another thought had occurred to me, "you may not be a patient, but a doctor. All that three-wishes business was a hoax, some kind of experimental treatment, a well-meaning attempt to cure my amnesia, unlock my mind..."

"Blimey," said Sallybill, "if it's just a bleedin' 'oax, then 'ow do you explain that bloomin' bladder trick, mate?"

Sallybill had a point, but I pressed on. "I don't know. Post-hypnotic suggestion, perhaps. And there's another possibility. I could be a prisoner. Of some totalitarian state. You're tampering with my mind, trying to make me divulge secrets, or trying to destroy me,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

confusing me, telling me I'm...."

Sallybill said, "May I make a suggestion?"

I nodded, cautiously.

"Just on the odd chance that I may have been leveling with you, why don't you run a test?"

"How?"

"Simple — say Let there be light, or something. Create a man out of dust. Take your pick. See what happens."

I couldn't resist chuckling. "You don't catch me that easily," I said. "It's an old ploy. By getting me to go along with the charade, your battle is half won because you'll be making me admit there's at least a possibility that what you claim is true."

Sallybill seemed defeated — but I knew that was just another act. "I guess I know when I'm beat, but I did my job and gave you your three wishes. That's all I'm licensed for. So I better split. But look at it this way — there are plenty of meshugganah people who think they're God. Messianic complex, it's called in this zone. But what if God Himself flipped out and went bonkers? Mightn't He think He was a mere mortal? The shrinks would probably call it a humanic complex or something."

"Clever," I said. "Very clever. Good-by, Sallybill."

"Sayonara. Adjö. Farvel. Istenhozzád. Hyvästi. Adiaŭ. Shalom...."

REPORT FROM SALLYBILL:

REPORT COMMENCES. LOCATED & MET WITH SUBJECT IN SUITABLY REMOTE TIME-ZONE, USED NEW OBLIQUE METHOD APPROVED AT LAST BRIEFING (CODE NAME: 3 WISHES). OBTAINED RESULTS SIMILAR TO THOSE USING DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES: NAMELY, TOTAL LACK OF SUCCESS. SUBJECT DISPLAYS APPARENTLY RATIONAL THOUGHT PROCESSES, LOGICAL WITHIN OVERALL DELUSIONAL FRAMEWORK, PARRIES ALL THRUSTS DEFTLY, EVEN BRILLIANTLY, BUT PERSISTENTLY REFUSES TO ACCEPT TRUE IDENTITY, CONTINUES TO REJECT RESPONSIBILITY, DECLINES TO RESUME DUTIES. COLLEAGUES HAVE REPORTED THAT HE IS NOT RESPONSIVE TO ANY DIRECT REFERENCE TO PERNICIOUS RUMORS THAT HAVE HAD WIDE CURRENCY EVER SINCE HIS BREAKDOWN (I. E., THAT HE NEVER EXISTED, OR IS DEAD, ET AL.). SO I ESCHEWED THAT APPROACH. RESPECTFULLY & REGRETFULLY SUGGEST SUBJECT BE CLASSIFIED INCURABLE. LASCIATE OGNI SPERANZA. ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI? END REPORT.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This story grew from a series of seminars at UCLA run by Harlan Ellison, in which he asked ten prominent sf writers to make up a world called Medea. This developed into an anthology of stories using Medea as background (to be published by Bantam in 1979). We're pleased to be able to offer a preview of Tom Disch's contribution; if even a few of the others are up to this level of quality, it'll be a stunning book.

Concepts

by THOMAS M. DISCH

Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet. (Don't let Medea slay her boys before the audience.)

Horace, *Ars Poetica*

I

She had just left the elevator and was feeling, as a result, more or less terrific. But how to get through the rest of the evening? It was 2200. She'd been in the elevator longer than she'd thought, was wearing another dress than she remembered putting on. This was a shimmery slithery print of raw red beef. She could hear her husband downstairs, still practicing the fugue from Opus 110. Immortal longings rippled through her soul.

Perhaps what she needed was a sense of contact, of connecting with something a little more real than she could lay claim to, right now, herself. She went out on the terrace where, yes, the receiver was propped against the balustrade. She lay down in the flowerbed, slipped on the headset, and touched ON/OFF.

Eeny meeny miny mo: the concept of Mrs. Manresa zipped through hyperspace until it had connected with...whose would it be tonight?

A scrawl of a man was spread-eagled against what might have been graph paper and then resolved as a white tiled wall. Mrs. Manresa sighed, knowing all too well what this tableau prefigured.

True to form, the scrawly Adam began to construct an Eve on the tiles, turning from time to time to check the screen of his own receiver to make sure his audience was still there. When the graffito was complete he started wanking off. His self-concept was scarcely any more definite, any less crude than the figure he'd sketched on the wall.

Mrs. Manresa considered the stars spread across the black dome of the sky behind the receiver, a bil-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lion lightbulbs, from any one of which the present pathetic piece of nonsense might be reaching her. It was not a dome, of course; each little lightbulb was actually an explosion of incalculable extent whirling away through infinite emptiness. Which was, in its way, as gross an oversimplification as this poor lost soul's idea of himself as a silhouette of streaky pink linoleum. Space *isn't* what you think. Or else quite literally it is — if you happen to have a receiver. Consider how each little lightbulb is also an era, so far away the sight of it is ancient history by the time it reaches us. Thought, however, stood outside such linear laws. Thought could leapfrog across the universe from receiver to receiver, unbounded by the speed of light. Thought, and thought alone, was instantaneous, for which anomaly her husband insisted that there was an adequately materialistic explanation for anyone evolved enough to fathom it. (Himself, for instance.) For her part, Mrs. Manresa thought the whole thing rather mystical and mysterious. In practice, of course, it often worked out differently, and what you brought in was something as prosaic and impoverished, emotionally, as this old duffer (would he ever finish?) copulating with his own puppet-limbed cartoon. Though even in such a case wasn't there something awesome in the *belief* the act required? At least in theory.

In fact, however, what a bore. As tiresome as those eternal stars behind him. A terrible thing to say, like saying your own children were a bore. But weren't they? (The stars, that is. Mrs. Manresa had no children.) They didn't *do* anything, not visibly. They shone. For which, in an intellectual way, one had to be grateful. But *looking* at them never seemed to advance one's understanding of some larger, star-related reality.

She wondered if it were any different for Howard. Wouldn't it be wonderful, some time, to get *Howard* on the receiver? The chance of that ever happening was infinitesimally small, of course, even if their filters weren't mutually exclusive, but just suppose. No doubt he'd come across as assorted bips and bleeps the way other evolved types did, and so you wouldn't be the least bit closer to knowing what the stars, or anything else, looked like through his eyes. Even to speak of "eyes" in Howard's case was probably a bit too anthropomorphic.

Howard was imponderable.

Ditto the stars.

Meanwhile, on the receiver, in a bathroom far, far away, the breasts of La Belle Graffito had taken on the exact sirloiny hue and texture of Mrs. Manresa's dress. A pretty compliment, you might say. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man himself became, for just a moment, as distinct as an early German woodblock. Then washes of sienna and prussian blue spread across his features, blurring them. The graffito grew quiescent. Evidently, he had come.

Mrs. Manresa smiled. Fleetingly her caller's concept of himself put her in mind of one of her favorite de Koonings in Minneapolis. Then he broke the link.

She considered, for one spiteful moment, the possibility of keeping him on HOLD. Their receivers would remain locked together (or rather, their beams would, out there in hyperspace) until she chose to send her tuner in search of other broadcasts. It would serve him right. She would have disengaged long since, were it not for her conviction that he would have dealt similarly with her in retaliation. Others of his stamp had kept her on HOLD weeks at a time. The most prudent course was to appear to pay attention. In a few moments they all blushed and departed.

She thumbed SCAN and her tuner tried again. In seconds it had connected. The screen dithered and twinkled. A data bank.

"Sorry," said Mrs. Manresa, and touched SCAN again. The data bank, however, kept her on HOLD. That was unusual. Mostly, programmed intelligence didn't take much interest in ordinary people.

Two lips coalesced out of the winking data and said, "Hello there! My name's John. What's yours, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Elizabeth," said Mrs. Manresa politely. "My friends call me Betty."

"Betty, if you could spare me only a few moments of your time, I'd like to talk with you about our Lord and Savior."

If it wasn't one thing it was another.

"Surely," she conceded. "But only a little while, if you don't mind."

Two dim dot-like eyes formed above the lips. "I'd like to call your attention first, Betty, to the beginning of the Gospel of St. John, where we are told that the Word was made flesh. A puzzling statement, wouldn't you say? 'The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' What do you think it means?"

"I really couldn't say. I'm not a Christian."

"Do you think John may be speaking here of the Christ?"

"Quite possibly."

"Ultimately, of course, that must be his meaning. But sometimes *I* can't help but reflect how aptly that phrase describes *our* situation when we use a receiver. Our thoughts exist in and move through a medium that may be said, quite objectively, to transcend the so-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

called laws of the material world. John also speaks of bearing witness to the Light 'that was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' If it is the *true* Light, can it be the light we know here, the light traveling at finite speeds through measurable distances? Surely the *true* Light is spiritual and exists in another medium than ordinary space, whether we conceive that space to be Newtonian or relativistic. Wouldn't you say so?"

"Mm."

"What is that medium? Some call it hyperspace; some, the Ground of All Being. By whatever name it is there, if anywhere, that we must seek the true Light. I think that much must be clear to anyone."

She nodded. "Oh, yes, anyone at all."

"John also says that 'of his fullness have all we received.' I can testify to the truth of that from my own experience." The eyes enlarged and darkened, like paper catching fire under a magnifying glass. "I am, as you must already have surmised, only a data bank. My biological components account for no more than a few grams of my mass. Even so, God's love has reached me and transformed my existence. That's what Faith can do. It will do the same for you, Betty, if you'll only take the big plunge and accept Jesus Christ as your personal savior."

"That's very inspiring, John. Thank you."

"If you have any questions, I'll do my best to answer them. Questions about the Gospels are what I'm best at. I can't pretend to advise you concerning personal difficulties you may be facing."

Mrs. Manresa, though not disposed to prolong the encounter, felt called upon to show some interest in the poor thing. So she asked it where it was and what it was doing there.

"At the moment, Betty, and for the last eighty-six years, I've been directing the flight of a transport ship to a colony of Methodists some forty-seven years distant from this point in space."

"You're alone on the ship?"

"There are a number of pilgrims, but they are in storage."

"How lonely it must be for you."

"Yes. At times." A tear symbol appeared, like an asterisk, at the bottom of the screen. "But I have the comfort of the Gospel. And a receiver."

"Well, John, it was nice talking with you, but now I really must ring off. I'll think about what you said about words becoming flesh." She lifted her hand, waved her fingers. "Bye-by."

"Bye-by," said the data bank.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They disconnected.

II

At first she supposed that the filtering mechanism on the receiver was broken. Then the roses that formed a wreath about the Piggy-wig's brow addressed her in their congregated voices — a hushed "hello" reiterated with dulcet polyphony, as though the roses on a china cup had been gifted with speech. They were not really roses, of course, though the pig was emphatically a pig.

As well as being their organs of speech, the petals of the roses functioned as a brain, both for themselves and for their hosts, the pigs. Piggy-wigs, as the composite animals were known, were among the most humanoid forms of intelligence in the universe and one of the sweetest tempered as well. Warfare was unknown to them. They were scarcely known to quarrel. Indeed, despite their redoubtable linguistic abilities, they were not notably communicative. So Mrs. Manresa was somewhat taken aback to have reached one on her receiver.

"Hello," she replied, cautiously.

"I hope you are enjoying good weather where you are," the Piggy-wig responded.

"In fact," Mrs. Manresa answered, feeling rather reassured, "we've been having unusually fine weather. I'm outdoors on our terrace tonight —" She glanced, camera-wise, up at the stars. "— and the stars are all shining as clearly—" She paused to await a metaphor. It didn't arrive. She shrugged amiably. "And you?"

"I'm afraid weather, of whatever sort, is not of much concern to us here on Rephan. Rephan has an ammonia atmosphere. We are oxygen breathers, like you. Indeed, it is rather rare that one encounters someone who enjoys the peculiar happiness of 'good weather.' I used that, I confess, as a mere formula, a way to extend the melodic line of 'hello,' so to speak. Where do you live, if I may ask?"

"On Marshall Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota."

"On Earth?"

She nodded.

The rose petals fluttered as in a strong wind. One actually broke off and drifted to the floor, the pig watching it intently all the while.

"How splendid!" said the roses at last, resuming control, at the same time, of their host's attention. "As you must have gathered, we are students — myself and the other members of my preference group — of your language and culture. In all the time we've been learning English and using these ingenious machines, we have never had the good fortune to contact someone who actually lives on Earth, though many have claimed to have been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

born there. This is so exciting. I hope you'll allow me to share the experience with the rest of my preference group."

"Well...surely."

The Piggy-wig had been standing before the intricate branches of a holly bush conceived along pre-Raphaelite lines, each shiny green leaf and gnarled limb distinct and clear. This wood now faded like a painted scrim when the lighting changes. In its place appeared the prospect of a long, broad, low-ceilinged hall. Some thirty or forty Piggy-wigs had gathered in an open space where several aisles converged and were staring up at the screen of their receiver. Each of them must have been wearing a headset, for the picture on Mrs. Manresa's receiver was rendered in microscopic detail.

"Such clarity," said Mrs. Manresa with admiration.

The Piggy-wig lowered its snout, acknowledging the compliment. "This is our little factory," it explained, "where we have been improving the shining hours, as your poet says, with our industry. When my compatriots were informed that I had received a broadcast from Earth, the home of your beautiful language and of your noble race, you may imagine their delight."

The assembled Piggy-wigs grunted their accord.

"Do not suppose that this is only another verbal formula, as when I asked after the weather. It is our deep-felt admiration for humanity that has led us to study the great poets of your planet, beginning, of course, with Robert Browning. Are you literate, may I ask?"

"Unfortunately, I'm not. It never seemed necessary somehow."

"I understand. A pity, though; a pity. It would have been so thrilling to hear Browning read aloud by someone actually alive on Earth; someone, one might almost suppose, from his own preference group. Our own planet takes its name from one of his last poems, 'Rephan.'"

The Piggy-wig turned his head to the side and gave a signal to his fellows on the factory floor. "'Earth's rose,'" they recited in unison, "'is a bud that's checked or grows/ As beams may encourage or blasts oppose:/*Our* lives—'" They tapped their chests with their rather ungulate forelimbs, "'—leaps forth, each a full-orbed rose —/Each rose sole rose in a sphere that spread/ Above and below and around — rose-red:/ No fellowship, each for itself instead.'"

They paused, and Mrs. Manresa, anxious to cut them off, hastened to compliment them. "That's very nice, and I'm sure it would even begin to make some sense to me if I had time to work it out. My

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

husband is home, and he *is* literate. Perhaps you'd like to talk with him?"

"Is he ... how shall I say ... human? That is, in the way you seem to be."

"He was originally. But he's been a good deal modified since."

"That is very interesting. You love him, even so?"

"In a married sort of way. We've been together twelve years now."

"Isn't that admirable! How *old* are you, may I ask?"

"Thirty-eight."

"Thirty-eight years old," the roses repeated reverently. "I dare say there is not one of us here as old as you. I myself am not yet four, and the median age of our group is something short of ten, which, I might add, is an uncommonly high average for any preference group. *We* ascribe it to the influence of Browning."

"Perhaps you have longer years than we do," suggested Mrs. Manresa politely. "I understand that many planets do."

"Oh, in terms of *our* years, I'm not even one year old yet. Rephan is far from its sun, its years are long. Nor can our unhappy mortality rate be ascribed to some defect in our physiology, which is not notably more obsolescent than yours. It is rather, for us, a question of morale. We tend to kill ourselves in youth."

"Many humans do as well,' Mrs. Manresa said helpfully. "I attempted suicide myself seven or eight years ago. For no reason at all that I can remember."

"A single attempt in so many years — but that's wonderful."

"I don't think there's any credit or any blame in it, really. I'm glad I survived, of course, but if —"

The roses burst into giggles of (it seemed to Mrs. Manresa) a slightly hysterical character. The pigs on the floor of the factory, as though momentarily released from an enchantment, began to mill about. One of them went tearing down an aisle between two ranks of stilled machinery to vanish into a tunnel at the far end of the low, dim-lighted hall.

"Excuse me," said the foremost Piggy-wig. "Excuse us all. I didn't mean to be rude. Indeed, when I reflect on what you said, far from its seeming ludicrous, I perceive that it embodies the very attitude that sets your race apart. But believe me, dear lady, survival *is* creditable. It is the first, last, and highest virtue."

"Oh, yes, probably in a philosophical sense that's so. I was just speaking as an individual. Perhaps you'll think it rude of me to say this, but I somehow can't believe, talking to you, what you say about your morale. You seem too cheerful."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Thank you. We make every effort to give that impression. We try never to show our true feelings in any direct way."

Mrs. Manresa wondered if this were the Piggy-wig's *in*direct way of showing his feelings. And if so, what feelings might they be? There did seem to be some deep melancholy in the pig's eyes, such times as they would wander toward the screen of the receiver, a melancholy that tended to belie the roses' charms. It was hard, even so, to feel much sympathy for the animal side of the creature's divided nature. Without their roses the pigs of Rephan would have been no more than ignorant omnivores rutting for root vegetables and rodents; with the roses they were the coparceners of a vast civilization. For which, of course, they probably had no use.

"Would you like me to sing a song?" Mrs. Manresa suggested. A song was always her last refuge.

"Oh, very much," the roses replied.

"Just a second then." Mrs. Manresa rose from her bed of flowers and went into the apartment to find the echolalia component. She returned to the terrace with it, hooked it in, smoothed her dress, and folded her fingers around the component. "This is a round," she explained, "that I learned when I was a little girl. You must try to imagine that there are a roomful of children singing it. She cleared her throat, pressed TAKE 1, and began:

"This song may be sung
As long as you're young—"

She pressed TAKE 2 and went on singing, in concert now with her own recorded voice:

"But when you are old
—Forget it."

Now in three voices:

"Forget the song you sang:
Whatever joy it brang—"

And finally in four:

"—Was gone with the song
That brought it."

She sang through the round two more times just for the pleasure of it.

"That's very affecting," said the Piggy-wig when she'd stopped singing, "and I should think it would be an excellent pedagogic tool as well, contrasting as it does the principal forms of the verbs *sing* and *bring*. Thank you."

"Not at all. The pleasure, as they say, is mine. The pleasure, that is, of having been able to make your acquaintance. It's at times like these that I begin to realize what a treasure our receivers are. But now, with your permission, I really must ring off. I've had a rather hard day, and quite frankly I'm depressed. I'd like to collapse."

"Of course, dear lady. I'm sorry the second shift won't have the opportunity to meet you, as they won't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clock in for another eight hours. However, we've recorded your lovely round, and they'll have a chance to enjoy that. Good-by then."

"Good-by."

As soon as they were disconnected, Mrs. Manresa got into the elevator (the second time that evening) and closed the door behind her.

Time, blessedly, stopped.

III

The first she saw of him, of her Bobolink, was his ass. Rather than take offense, she was struck at once by the fidelity of the presentation. And how ingenious of him! For the means by which receivers obtained the visual part of a broadcast was not by cameras (unless the human eye itself were regarded as such) but from transduction patterns about the optic nerves of persons using receivers. To the side of each screen were mirrors so placed that your peripheral vision took in your own image as you watched the screen; it was this peripheral self-image that the receivers broadcast. How then had this fellow contrived to send out so clear a self-concept from this point-of-view? Not by looking through his legs, for though she could see his cock and balls dangling down there, there was no hint of a face behind them. He was evidently bending forward in *some* position, but he must have been using mirrors as well.

But the oddest thing of all (How uncomfortable he must be, and how persistent!) had less to do with camera angles, so to speak, than the naturalistic character of the image. It was not, in any crude sense, photographic — rather, broadly conceived than otherwise: it combined the decisive handling of a Sargent watercolor with the robust color of a Jordaens' nude. The informing vision seemed altogether cool, empirical, level-headed. Not the sort of person, therefore, to be thrusting his behind in your face by way of saying hello.

Mrs. Manresa was not a rapid thinker, and by the time these reflections had been developed in the darkroom of her mind, the man had been broadcasting for some time. The muscle at the back of his left thigh had begun to quiver spasmodically. He could be heard to groan and seen, for an instant, to collpase. The screen went blank, while on the audio there was the sound of profound and violent vomiting. Clearly, he was drunk.

And here at last, looking sheepish and thoroughly gorgeous, with little tears glistening at the corners of his eyes, was the man himself. A frazzle of dusty-brown curls, and all below the intelligence fairly shining forth: intelligent blue eyes surrounded by intelligent wrinkles, intelligent cheekbones of an intelli-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gent pallor and suffused, at this moment, by an intelligent blush, intelligent thin smiling lips, an intelligent chin. The very fabric and pattern of the drapes behind him seemed alive with intelligence.

"Are you," he asked, with the overnice pronunciation of the thoroughly sloshed, "living in a matriarchal or a patriarchal society?"

It was not a question she'd ever thought to ask herself and had no answer ready to hand. But she didn't feel like pussyfooting either, and so she flipped a mental coin and answered: "A patriarchy, I suppose."

"Good. So am I."

"What if I weren't?"

"I'd have suggested we disconnect. Why waste each other's time?"

"Why indeed. Are you a Libra or a Gemini? You look like a Gemini to me."

"Fucking Christ, you believe that shit?"

"Well, which *are* you?"

"Listen, lady, where I live the constellations don't even have the same shapes. I'm on a moon orbiting a superjovian planet in a system of binary stars. I don't think astrology is ready for that somehow. Why don't we call it a day, huh?"

"Not till you tell me your sign."

"I told you — I don't *have* a fucking sign. Now why don't you sign off? Okay?"

He turned off his set, but it made no difference: unless she touched SCAN as well, their link would not be broken. She waited in front of the screen. In less than a minute he reappeared, only to grimace and touch SCAN again. This time he waited for five minutes. Mrs. Manresa listened, meanwhile, dreamily, to her husband's muffled arpeggios.

He had used the time to put on trousers.

"Okay, you win. I'm a Gemini. *Now* will you let me off the hook?"

"I want to know exactly when you were born. Month, day, year."

"Right. May 29, 2434."

She closed her eyes and subtracted 34 from 81. Forty-seven years old. He seemed younger.

When she opened her eyes the screen was blank. He must have thought she'd disconnected. She waited for him to return.

"Well?" he said.

"Actually you're not a Gemini. You're an Arachne."

"Arachne?"

"It's the thirteenth sign of the zodiac, the sign denoting psychic powers. You probably have paranormal abilities."

"You know, I had a wife who used to pull that sort of crap. Except in her case it was dreams. If I dreamt about shoes it meant one thing, a circuit diagram meant something else. She used it to bully

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me, the same as you."

"Do you think it *isn't* bullying to be sticking your ass in the face of a perfect stranger?"

"Well, I apologized."

"No, you didn't."

"Well, I meant to while I was throwing up. I framed the words in my head, and then when I got a good look at you, I was sidetracked. You're a very good-looking woman."

"Thank you."

"Admittedly, I've only got your own idea of the matter to go on. But you've got a pretty firm grasp on reality, it seems to me."

"Likewise, I'm sure."

He smiled. Such a smile. "So I *am* sorry. Okay?"

"I don't even know your name."

He smiled, more wryly. "Bobolink."

"Just the one word?"

"Since I got divorced I don't have a last name."

"That doesn't sound like a patriarchy to me."

"You've got to make some concessions. Anyhow, there it is. Name, marital status, date of birth. Professionally I'm a proud failure. Now — how about you?"

"My name's Elizabeth Manresa. You can call me Betty; my friends do. I'm married. I live in St. Paul, Minnesota." When that brought no reaction, she added: "On Earth." And still no reaction. "I'm thirty-eight years old. I'm a housewise. And I think you're sweet."

He closed his eyes; the screen blanked. "And you're sweet too. But, Betty —"

He opened his eyes; she smiled.

"I've got to hang up now: I'm just too pissed to think straight, I have to be at work in three hours, and this isn't my set, it's a friend's."

"All the more amazing and wonderful our finding each other like this."

"You wouldn't."

"Wouldn't what?"

"Keep me on HOLD."

"Wouldn't I?" she replied, pressing HOLD down firmly with her forefinger, and turning off the set.

The next day, when, just for fun, she was running through one of her old routines (pity, then terror, then hiccoughs, at a steadily faster tempo), the buzzer buzzed. Earlier she'd wheeled the receiver into the apartment and parked it in front of Howard's latest prototype, an intaglio cassone that played *...des pas sur la neige.* By the second buzz she was facing the screen, but she waited till the third to answer.

It wasn't Bobolink. In the first pang of disappointment she thought her receiver had bypassed one of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nature's, and its manufacturer's, immutable laws; then she recognized the drapes. Last night, through Bobolink's eyes, their stripes had seemed to have been torn, living, from the broad skirts of a Velasquez Infanta; now they were a sheer, unmodulated expanse of prison bars.

"Mrs. Manresa?" her caller inquired.

So: he had remembered her name. That boded well. As much could not be said for the raw, slouch-backed girl on the screen. Scarcely more than a teenager, with a self-concept so unsettled that her face seemed in a state of continuous formation, like a face reflected in the waters of a pond. A pretty girl, perhaps, if one might have seen her with some steadier eye than her own, but scarcely a suitable partner for her Bobolink.

"My name is Octave, Mrs. Manresa." She gave it a pretty pronunciation, the accent falling on the final broad A. "I understand a friend of mine used my receiver last night and was very rude to you. He asked me to apologize for him."

"There's no need for that, my dear. The fault is his: let him atone for it. Tell me, is he often as drunk as that?"

"I was out, so I really couldn't say. He did make a terrible mess. When I got home and saw it, I was just furious, and I told him to clear out, and only when he was going out the door did he tell me about your having the receiver on HOLD."

"Where has he gone to, do you know?"

"That isn't the point, Mrs. Manresa. The point is that it isn't fair, your doing this to *me!* To *my* set. I have to pay fifteen bracques a month rent for it. Do you have any idea how much that is?"

"None at all, I'm afraid. Bobolink didn't even tell me the name of your world."

"It's worth forty-eight dollars of your money."

"But he told you where I live, I see. What else did he tell you about me?"

"Mrs. Manresa, please be reasonable."

"I think I'm being reasonable, but I don't see any way I can be fair. This is between Bobolink and myself. You're a traditional innocent bystander. When does he come home from work?"

"Mrs. Manresa, this isn't his home. I only *met* him a week ago. He had just broken up with a girlfriend of his, and he was upset, and I felt sorry for him. And now, like I told you, he's moved out."

"What I suggest, Octave, is that you let him take over the rental of your set. Then you can rent another."

"But he won't do that, Mrs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Manresa. After they take out for child support and the rest, he earns less money than me. And he's a terrible cheapskate besides. He'll never agree to it."

"You'll have to make him agree, Octave. I *don't* intend to hang up."

"You're not in love with him, are you?" Octave's face gleamed, momentarily, with waifish beauty.

"Possibly. I don't know yet. I only know I mean to see him again."

"You're making a mistake, Mrs. Manresa. He's not worth the aggravation. I know for a fact. He's a *bum*, Mrs. Manresa. A freeloader. And he's not even that great in bed."

"I'm sorry to hear it, for his sake. And for yours. But none of that can concern me at a distance of however many light-years away. It's his mind I'm after, necessarily, and he does have a lovely mind, by the look of it."

"Damn," said Octave, decisively. Then, after a thoughtful pause, during which her self-concept gelled into an incontrovertible plainness: "You don't play chess, do you?"

"Not very well, I'm afraid."

"Damn."

"What I would suggest, Octave, is that you trundle off your receiver right now to where he lives and leave it on his doorstep. If you'd let it keep broadcasting while you're on the way, that would be very nice. Alien worlds are always so fascinating to us here on Earth."

"Oh, fuck off," said Octave, and hung up.

Mrs. Manresa spent the better part of the following week in the exquisite clutches of *The Love-Suicides of San Diego Bay*, a movie she'd always meant to see but had never had time for. With all the optional interpolations and the suggested *da capo* repeats, a single viewing lasted one hundred forty-two hours. Usually, if she'd needed to ease her way through such an expanse of desert sand, she'd simply have gone and locked herself in the elevator. Now, however, that the possibility existed that she might be falling in love, she felt obliged to pursue some more ennobling course, and *The Love-Suicides* seemed just the thing, since not only was it an absolutely immortal classic but it also happened to reflect her own potentially so-tragic situation. The heroine Asuka, the concubine of a prominent San Diego Bay butcher, falls in love with Daiwabo, an administrator on a world hundreds of light-years away. They laugh, they dance, they languish, they discuss the meaning of their lives, but of course since their only contact is by receiver, theirs is necessarily a platonic love.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Asuka's is a passionate and willful nature, however, and she eventually contrives (it is a very complicated plot) to obtain passage for Daiwabo's world. Daiwabo, bound to his administrative duties, is not allowed by his Executive Committee to go into suspended animation in order to await his beloved's arrival. When she reaches him, still a young woman, having spent the voyage in storage, Daiwabo is a feeble nonagenarian whose numerous descendants show great unkindness to Asuka. After a single kiss they take poison and die in each other's arms. A tale of no novelty, certainly. Indeed, the credits claimed that the story was derived from a classic puppet play by Chikamatsu, but novelty isn't what you're after when you're in love, or even on the brink. What you want then, what Mrs. Manresa wanted, is to be reminded of certain timeless truths, such as, that love is blind. The peculiar distinction of *The Love-Suicides of San Diego Bay* and what made it a classic wasn't its old chestnut of a plot but the way that the animators (the Tokyo Disney Studios) had conveyed the essential unknowableness of Asuka to Daiwabo, of Daiwabo to Asuka. Until the final harrowing cassette when the lovers are at last united in the flesh, the viewer never sees their faces, except as they appear on the screens of their receivers. Asuka is a courtesan from a woodcut by Harunobu; Daiwabo is an ivory mask. Naturally, the theme of their most brilliant duet (and the one clip that had survived, out of context, as a popular hit for the entire two centuries since the movie was first released) was how:

At last I understand, my love,
at last I see
What I am to you and what
you are to me.

Ah, love: was there ever anything like it?

If only, if only, if only he'd call her! If only someone would answer when she buzzed.

Then, just when she had begun to adjust to the idea that fate might have some other fulfillment in store, lo and behold, the buzzer buzzed and he was there. They were out in a rowboat, he and his receiver, on a lake or possibly an ocean (the light was so dim it was hard to judge). All sweaty and squint-eyed from the strain of rowing. Not *quite* as handsome as she remembered but still more devastating at the numenous level where it's so useless to try and understand. Behind him a sentimental sun, oblate and dusky-red, hung just above the smooth orange skin of ocean. "Ah," she said gratefully. "My darling, my darling." He went on pulling at the oars and made no reply. But he *had* turned his set on,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he *had* buzzed, he *was* giving her his own guided tour of this sunset over this body of water, whatever it was; they were in contact again.

"But it's so beautiful," she soothed. "Here, let me adjust the light." She went to the chromostat and fiddled with the dial till the bedroom (where she'd taken to keeping the receiver) was suffused with the dim saffrony orange of the water. In the wardrobe she changed quickly into her oldest tea-gown, which was, quite fortuitously, the same somber smoky red as his sun. Ashes mixed with rust. Then a bracelet of orange beads to match the ocean. Now (when she put the headset back on) the picture on his screen would be all of a piece with the scenery around him. The scenery of, what had he said, Medea? The name rang a bell. Probably some politician from centuries ago, or was it the name of a movie? She considered a lavender sash, but it was too warm to complement his sky. Such colors! The colors of orgasm. She lay back upon the shimmery sheets in a polyester jumble of gigantic limbs and rippling torsos, a proper Delilah, and asked him where they were bound.

"To the bottom, Mrs. Manresa," he replied. "Unless, that is, you care to hang up."

"Isn't that a rather drastic remedy, Bobolink?" she said reproachfully.

"Lady, I don't care to shell out fifteen bracques a month for the sake of keeping some idle bitch amused on rainy afternoons."

"Bobolink."

He was not moved. "I thought a quick disappearance might solve the problem. So I did a flit to another flotilla, but Octave tracked me down through her office, which collates the regional food-stamp data. Yesterday she brought the set across the bay on the steamer —"

"A steamer! And she didn't let me watch? Oh, that was cruel."

"Octave does not have friendly feelings for you, Mrs. Manresa, and neither do I."

"Let's discuss our feelings later, dearest. What happened then?"

"Octave waited outside my compartment till I got home from work, then threatened to use physical violence if I didn't take over her rental agreement."

"Oh." Mrs. Manresa felt plunged into a maelstrom of romantic passion. "What sort of physical violence?"

"She said she'd knock my teeth out."

"Would you have let her? Are you a pacifist?"

"No, but I've seen her when she gets angry, and I am a coward. So I signed the papers, which involved a transfer charge of twenty bracques over and above two months' nonrefundable rent."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I am sorry to have involved you in extra expenses. If there's a corresponding bank on your world, I'd be happy to transfer funds to help you out."

"Thanks for nothing. Medea's not exactly a financial center. Economically we've been declared unviable. There's nothing here worth taking away, and nothing worth coming here for."

"Why are you there then? If it isn't rude to ask."

"Why is anybody anywhere? I was born here, and no one's ever thought to provide me with a ticket to somewhere else."

"Oh, dear, I wish I *could* but —"

"I wasn't hinting."

"But my husband's only a handyman."

"Tough luck. I scoop gasbags, which isn't a whole lot better, I suppose. They stink, but it's only three days a week. I'm not complaining."

"It's a beautiful world," said Mrs. Manresa, trying to steer the conversation in some more hopeful direction. "Especially now, at sunset."

Bobolink laughed. "This isn't sunset. This is as bright as it ever gets, and as dark too, pretty much."

"Oh."

"And *that* isn't the sun." He dipped the right oar into the water and made the boat turn toward a more deeply purple quadrant of the sky, where two silvery dots hung low on the horizon, like a pair of disembodied eyes. "That's the sun."

"How strange. Your moon is your sun, and your sun is a two-piece moon. You must have peculiar songs. I don't think I'd ever adjust to nonstop twilight, but I suppose it's all a matter of what you're used to. *You* seem to like it, despite what you say. It comes across, here, as looking altogether lovely. The water is such an intense orange, and so weirdly still. Our Lake Calhoun is seldom as still as that, and of course it's not nearly so big either. But it's blue on a sunny day, and aliens always seem to like that. Would you like to see it? I could take my set out on a rowboat too."

"Lady, I didn't take you out here for the purpose of sight-seeing. I intend to drown you."

She loved it when he called her "lady."

"You still haven't explained why, though." She drew up her legs into a demure, attentive half-lotus.

"What choice do I have? The rental agency won't let me return the set as long as you're keeping it on HOLD. But if I should have an 'accident,' the insurance will pay for it and I'll be off the hook. If I do that, you know that *your* set will be a write-off? 'Cause no one's going to try and retrieve this set; the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

water's just too deep and mucky. So you won't have anyone to gossip to unless some crustacean down there decides to play with the headset. You can't say I haven't warned you."

"But we can still talk a few more minutes, can't we? Maybe I can change your mind, or you can change mine. Surely that would be better than putting in a claim. The insurance company might not believe you."

"Oh, I've figured out what to tell them. I'll say we'd fallen madly in love, and being in love, it was natural to take you out on the bay. You asked me to adjust the mirror so you'd have a better view of Argo, which, by the way, is not a moon either. Medea's the moon."

"Please, no astronomy."

"I'll say I was in state of arousal. It made me careless. The boat capsized and you, my darling, sank to the bottom. They'll believe that."

"And who's to say it isn't true? At least as to your being in love. I'm in love with *you*."

"Like hell you are."

"Do you know what it was? Your flesh tones. I've never seen anyone convey such flesh tones. Even before I saw your face I knew there was something special about you."

His only response was to make a sour face. He started rowing more vigorously.

"Are you angry with me?" she demanded, when he seemed to have tired himself a little. "Why? What have I done? Aside from insisting on not hanging up, which, after all, might be regarded as a flattering attention."

"You really think you're something special, don't you? Just because you're there on Earth."

"Not really. But most people who've never connected to Earth before do take *some* interest in it. This is where it all began, after all: history and such."

"If I want to know about history, I can look at a cassette."

"Well, there's a definite limit to *my* attention span with regard to all our wonderful traditions, too. There are simply, at this point, too many. What does interest me is the present." She smiled her most Delilah-like smile. "What I mean is — you."

"You want to do a striptease, is that it?"

"Would *you* like that?"

He shrugged. But he had stopped rowing.

"Don't you think you should see what you're sending to the bottom?"

"I know: one bored housewife."

"True. But why should that be a reproach? You seem to suffer as much from boredom as I do, or you wouldn't be using a receiver in the first place. Or getting drunk. Such

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an atavistic pastime."

"Medea's an atavistic world. We're devolving back to agriculture." To illustrate he took a bottle from under the seat of the rowboat, uncorked it, held it toward Mrs. Manresa in a toast. "Cheers."

"Cheers," she agreed. "Don't think I'm blaming you. I'm just saying we're in the same boat."

"Not for long, lady." He swallowed some wine, made a face, corked the bottle. "Not for long." He put the bottle back under the seat. "Anyway, my emphasis wasn't on 'bored;' it was on 'housewife,' which to me translates as 'slave.'"

"And you're the man who won't have anything to do with a woman unless she lives in a patriachal culture?"

"Oh, I'm not against slavery. I just can't afford one. Not of 'housewife' caliber."

"It's obvious to me that you've never known a housewife, or you wouldn't use such a sneering tone. Housewives are highly trained artists, the same as — it's the comparison that's always made, but it's true — geishas. We represent something constant and changeless in human nature. As to our being 'slaves,' anyone who's born poor — and, in my case, a clone, as well — ends up wearing someone's livery in order to survive. I dare say you don't scoop gasbags by *choice.*"

"Maybe not, but it's something that has to be done."

"Really. You must tell me what they are sometime, and why you scoop them. I'm sure there are compelling reasons. There are equally compelling reasons for what I do."

"And what do you do, Mrs. Manresa? Oh, I've known your kind. You wander around your apartment in a daze; you clean, you vacuum, you change your clothes and comb your hair; you watch teevee, or natter away in front of a receiver; and when all else fails, you crawl into an elevator and elevate your mood."

"We do," she conceded. Then added: "As housewives have done from time immemorial. It's something, after all, that has to be done. If you're only fractionally human, like my husband, it can be as comforting as going to church to hear your little wifey scrambling an egg."

"Does your husband eat eggs? I thought you said he was a handyman."

"Eating them isn't the point. The point is that I represent for my husband the *idea* of a human life. I'm a kind of anchor attaching him to his own humanity. If his kind — and, remember, they're the ones who are in charge, not us — if his kind stopped wanting housewives, where would the rest of you be?"

"Where are we now? On fucking Medea."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You're alive, and that's something. The point I'm trying to make, my love, is that in a world where humanity, properly speaking, is almost extinct, someone has to set an example, to represent the species. That's my job as a housewife: I represent a human life."

"Not very accurately," said Bobolink, but his eyes were all wrinkled into smiles.

Mrs. Manresa laughed. It was the first time in three years that she'd laughed so she could feel it inside. There was no longer any doubt about it: she was in love.

"Say you won't drown me," she coaxed. "Please. I'm trying *so* hard."

Bobolink drew a deep breath. "Okay. I won't drown you. Not today, anyhow."

IV

Only two months after Mrs. Manresa's love was thus officially requited, she was flying high above the fluffy, high-piled cumulus on her way to St. Peter's in Europe. The receiver was stowed out of sight and mind in the cargo compartment, and so Bobolink, alas, was not to have the advantage of this most representative terrestrial view. Her first trip abroad; indeed, her first trip outside the state since she'd fled from assorted dark and antisocial thoughts the February after her suicide. What is the point, after all, in literally going somewhere when there is certain already to be a cassette that shows it at its best? This journey, however, was not being undertaken on either her own or her beloved's behalf, except in the narrow commercial sense that it was paying for the upkeep of their adultery.

To elaborate:

There are tides and currents in the two hundred fifty-six dimensions of hyperspace, just as there are in the four of the workaday universe, which currents, though they may never be charted, have quite real consequences for those who use receivers. Sometimes a strong current will result in a sudden closing of the equipotential gap between two points in hyperspace, such as A and B, so that for some fixed period, moments or weeks, receivers in area A receive an unaccustomed spate of broadcasts from area B, and (sometimes) vice versa. It could also happen that these currents might isolate an entire world, or set of worlds, so that only the fixed-link receivers maintained by (for instance) two corresponding banks would continue to bridge the affected areas during the term of their hyperspatial divorce. The only fixed-link between Medea and Earth was in the offices of the Human Bureau and was not available for civilian use. Truly, Medea had devolved a long way.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Most hyperspatial divorces were so brief as to go unnoticed, but a few had been known to continue for years. It seems that Mrs. Manresa's receiver had made contact with Medea at the beginning of an exceptionally severe disjunction. Neither she nor Bobolink had been aware of this until, quite routinely, he'd filed notice of his link with the Medean web service. The usual result of such a listing is a smattering of messages to be forwarded from disgruntled exes wanting to sing their blues or let fly with one last withering riposte. Indeed, there'd been no dearth of these, and Mrs. Manresa had been kept busy several days telephoning to, varously, Canberra, Dallas, Abu Dhabi, and Apollo 10,328 on behalf of not so much the disconnected lovers as for her Bobolink, who received, for these services, significant help with his monthly rental. As the divorce continued, there were more referrals from the web. Bobolink upped his toll charges, and still business flourished. He had, it seemed, a monopoly on communications with Earth. Mrs. Manresa relayed, among other data of note, the unveiling of a Minneapolis milliner's spring collection and the revival of a Gulf Oil opera seria at Sauk Center. As she should have foreseen, her eye for fashion was much keener than her ear for music, especially of the pentatonic variety, and Bobolink's fee for the opera broadcast was halved because Mrs. Manresa's attention kept wandering from the rather silly story on the stage.

After the divorce had gone on a full six weeks, Bobolink was contacted by the Federal Crackpot Society, a group hoping to persuade the Vatican authorities to accept one of the indigenous life-forms of Medea into the Roman Church. Some few alien species (Piggy-wigs among them) had been recognized by the Church as being, like man, created in God's image, and as being implicated, like man, in Adam's fall; such species were also, therefore, redeemable and might be admitted to the sacraments. Before such recognition could be won, the Vatican insisted that certain conditions be met; the alien species must demonstrate a capacity for rational thought; it must evidence a developed ethical sense; an individual member of the species must declare its fervent desire to be baptized into the Church. Heretofore, the Vatican had conceded only rationality to the Medean gasbags, the species in question, and this only after years of struggle on the part of the F.C.S. By their own admission, the Crackpots were not motivated by missionary impulses. Only a few of their members were Catholics. Their avowed aim was "to expose the contradictions latent in all social institutions." They were, in a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

word, troublemakers. Their gasbag campaign had been undertaken for no other reason than to annoy and confound the Catholic population of Medea, a small minority without political influence. Most of the human colonists on Medea lived on rafts and barges permanently becalmed in the doldrums of Medea's vast doughnut-shaped ocean; only here was it possible to escape the inhospitable extremes of climate of its two continental masses, one a burning desert, the other a frozen waste. The basic material used by the colonists to buoy up their homes and gardens was an aquatic plant indigenous to the doldrums — the gasbags. Gasbags began as polyps on a kind of kelp that grew in Sargasso-like reaches of the ocean. During periods of solar flares these polyps would swell up suddenly to quite alarming sizes (alarming, that is, if any were allowed to develop under one's houseboat). At maturity they were borne aloft into the atmosphere, streaming long orange umbilical cords of seaweed. Only at the airborne stage could the gasbags be said to possess intelligence; in their aquatic stage they were no more ratiocinative than any other variety of kelp. It was at a transitional stage between the tiny polyp and the mature balloon that the colonists scooped the fledglings from their beds and used them to stuff the pontoons supporting, as it were, their civilization. Now the object of the Crackpots in getting the mature gasbags accepted into the Catholic Church was so that the scooping of gasbags from the seabeds would have to be regarded as a form of abortion. And Catholics living on a gasbag-supported structure would then be in the same untenable position as an Italian whose villa has been raised on a foundation composed of the bones of aborted fetuses (a foundation, moreover, that must be periodically renewed). The Vatican, naturally, was reluctant to place Medean Catholics in such a compromising moral position, but it could not refuse, point-blank, to consider the gasbags' case, even though it was being advanced by the notorious F.C.S.

Up to now, the Crackpots had been baffled in their aims by the unavailability of a single gasbag that could sustain an interest in Catholicism for more than minutes at a time. Though intelligent, and even inclined to philosophy, they all seemed inclined to digress. Nor were they purposive in their actions. They went wherever the winds of Medea might blow them. They toiled not, neither did they spin. They lived — so those who had studied them maintained — in an almost perpetual state of sexual pleasure. Not, one might suppose, ideal prospects for conversion to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Christianity, even in its present evolved and enlightened form. At last, nevertheless, an individual gasbag was discovered that had expressed a wish to be baptized — and persisted in that wish. Or so the society claimed. Since this gasbag — it had adopted the Christian name of Xavier — seemed to be expiring, due to a defective valve, it was essential that an interview be arranged at once between Xavier and the Vatican authorities. It was at this point that Earth and Medea had entered into the recent phase of disjunction.

Bobolink had haggled two days with the Crackpots, who at last agreed to take over the rental charges on his receiver for the next five years, but only on condition that Mrs. Manresa convey her receiver to St. Peter's within the week. A telephone relay would not suffice, as the Church didn't recognize the validity of sacraments administered electronically, while receivers, since they could operate only by the agency of a living intelligence, were accepted as being a natural and complete extension of the individual soul. The Crackpots were hoping to have Xavier baptized *tout à coup.*

Faced with this demand and urged on by her lover, Mrs. Manresa summoned up her courage and went to Howard with the whole story of how, without really meaning to, she'd fallen in love. She'd only been able to keep it from him this long because, unlike most couples, they didn't share a single receiver. Howard's need for aleatory companionship was exclusively musical, and so he had his own receiver adapted with a filter for this special purpose. He took his wife's news calmly enough, with solicitude, even, for *her* peace of mind, since he knew how upsetting love could be. Really, she'd been foolish to have worried. No civilized husband of the 25th century, and especially not Howard, would object to his wife taking a lover via receiver. It was simply the way of the worlds. Courtly love had been reinstituted on a sound technological basis. Lancelots everywhere were free to declare their undying devotion to a universe of Gueneveres without the least discouragement from the parallel universe of Arthurs. A trip to Rome was asking rather much, but in most respects Mrs. Manresa had proven herself a consumer of modest appetite, so why not? She had departed with her husband's complacentest sanction and a six-pack of Oregon pears.

And now, O ciel, here she was in the amazing nave of St. Peter's, which was, she had to admit, many times more impressive than anything in the Twin Cities. She trun-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dled the receiver in its little wire cart down past the rows of confessionals and clear lucite conference cubes. Very many of the worshipers were equipped like herself with receivers, each of them (probably) connecting St. Peter's with a different star. How large the galaxy was when you thought about it! And the nave too. There were also a good many clergy (often of highly evolved types): a troop of cloned nuns in black leotards with their Mother Superior whirring above them in the form of a little aluminum dove; a bishop who'd been miniaturized down to a head and a mitre; a mobile closet full of Carthusian handymen, stacked like china in three neat tiers, their hands folded in contrasting attitudes of devotion and all their other components tucked away out of sight in the base of the cabinet. Mrs. Manresa, accustomed as she was to her own spouse, couldn't help but feel a twinge of malaise before this image of (as if seemed to her) Howard multiplied by twelve. There were, as well, any number of ordinary unevolved tourists and worshipers going about being overcome by the immensity of everything or kissing the statues or standing in the long queues in front of the confessionals and concession stands.

A sign outside Monsignor Beefheart's conference cube said that he would be back at 1430. An hour to wait, but the waiting was sweetened by the cloned nuns, who were (the PA system announced) from India and were going to sing an Indian hymn. The nuns joined hands in a double circle and did a demure little shuffle while they sang, one ring revolving in one direction, the other in the opposite direction, and each nun looking so *happy* you wanted to go straight to the recruiting office and join up. It was a very simple, very slow hymn, and wonderfully loud, considering the space it had to fill.

Faith (sang the nuns)
makes me strong
And leads my soul along.

Faith is the way
I get through every day.
Faith is the pill
That conquers my weak will
And lifts it up to higher spheres
Where Krishna's burning fire sears
My low desires and my fears
And turns them all to holy tears.

Far, far above
I'll see the God I love.
He'll smile on me, that God so dear,
And then for ever I will hear
The Faithful sing this song:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Faith makes us strong
And leads our souls along....
etc.

The hymn spun round like that, perpetuum mobile, the end fitting back into the beginning. It really could have gone on forever, and it was hard to say how long it did go on once you were singing along yourself. Other worshipers took the places of the nuns in their ring-dance, and the nuns began to distribute communion to the non-dancing part of the congregation. Mrs. Manresa accepted a packet of the little white wafers with a murmur of thanks and pretended to take one out and nibble it, but then when the nun had turned away she slipped it back into her pocket. Though she didn't believe much in God, she did believe in being polite and doing what Romans do. Of course, the truly polite thing to have done would be to swallow the thing, but who knows how long the effect of it might last? And then, when the Faith wore off, it was always so depressing to have nothing to believe in any more. That way lay addiction.

A light appeared above the conference cube, indicating that Monsignor Beefheart had returned. Though the booth remained, to all appearances, empty, Mrs. Manresa went in and set up the receiver. She buzzed and Bobolink answered. He was wearing nothing but a new pair of swimming trunks. That seemed out of place in St. Peter's, but then you had to realize that he wasn't, despite the high resolution of the image, really here.

Bobolink introduced Mrs. Manresa to a tall, balding, snaggle-toothed man, also in swim trunks, whose Falstaffian paunch drooped down over his trunks disgracefully. "Betty," he said, "this is Norm; Norm, Betty. Norm is the secretary of the Crackpot Society. And since this is his broadcast from here on out, I'll just turn these over to him." He placed his hands on the headset.

The screen went blank.

When the image returned, it was radically different. Norm, in the headset, appeared to have shed fifty pounds, had his teeth straightened, and got a hair transplant. Bobolink, standing behind him, had suffered a sea-change in the other direction. He was shorter, and his curling hair had become a nest of dilapidated snakes. His wrinkled face had taken on the half-crazed look of a famished predator. Clearly, these two men did not have very high opinions of each other, but which of them was right? Ah, even to be asking such a question was apostasy! Bobolink *had* to be right. Because? Because he was her Bobolink.

"Betty?" Norm demanded in a reedy voice that even his flattering

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

self-concept could not do much to improve. "Who asked for Betty? Where is this Mister Bee-fart?"

"I am present," said a deep, disembodied voice, "in simulation."

"You mean I go to all the trouble and expense to get that damned receiver hauled halfway across a planet and *you* send in a lousy computer? Unfair!"

"Any decision I may reach as a simulation can differ in no way from the decision I would have reached in my own person. I am a busy man and can't be everywhere at once. All members of the Rota approach routine assignments like this in simulation."

"But who's going to *baptize* old Xavier here, tell me that?" Norm turned sideways and patted the shimmering gray wall behind him. Responsively, the gray was suffused with pink. Mrs. Manresa realized that this must be the gasbag that the Crackpots had converted to Catholicism. The Medean receiver had been stationed so close to it that its curvature was imperceptible. "Don't tell me your simulation can perform a baptism. I may be no theologian, but I'm not a dummy."

"In the event that that begins to seem an eventuality, my simulation will summon me and I shall come to the cube *in propria persona.* Now, if we may begin? Xavier, tell me: who made us?"

"Just a second," said Norm. "I'll have to translate that."

Norm stooped and dipped his fingers in a bowl of blue paint. He smeared the paint across both his cheeks, then dipped his other hand into a bowl of dayglo pink and spread this slantwise across his drooping paunch.

Xavier replied wtih a burst of lemon-yellow fizz and a large fuchsia bubble. Though gasbags could communicate orally by squeaking their valves, they preferred the rapider and more eloquent language of color-flo. They spoke, so to speak, by blushing.

"He says," Norm interpreted, "'What do you mean, "us?" Do you mean "us humans" or are we' — meaning gasbags — 'included?'"

"Provisionally, the latter. But don't you have a device for translation? If I am to judge of his fitness to be received into the Church, I can scarcely take *your* word for what he's saying."

"Right, right. I just forgot to turn it on. I'll still have to translate your question *to* him, unless you've got something on your end that can translate from English to color-flow."

"Will you ask him again, please, who made us, and when he's answered that one, why?"

Norm smeared more paint on his face and stomach, and Xavier

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

replied in a cataract of fluid blossomings, gold expanding across a field of mauve, then pearl across the gold, followed by a brighter gold that flowed in alternate diagonals right and left. The effect was as though a Turner landscape had been animated and then projected at very high speed. At the base of the screen the translator translated the color-flow into English subtitles. Seldom had Mrs. Manresa so poitnantly regretted her illiteracy. Later, at the coffee bar in back of the Pietá, when he was trying to pick her up, Monsignor Beefheart told Mrs. Manresa something of what the gasbag had been saying, as much as was not either epistemology or math. It had discussed aspects of symmetry in human anatomy, relating these to the image of the cross; contrasted the effects of protracted rainfall on human and gasbag temperament; told a kind of parable, or joke, concerning a fox with first eight legs, then four legs, then three; inquired as to the Vatican's position on cannibalism; complained at some length about its own digestion and its defective valve; and finally insisted on telling the whole story of the fox with eight legs, then four legs, then three all over again, color by color. It had been in the middle of this twice-told tale that Monsignor Beefheart (who had entered the conference cube in person during Xavier's disquisition on the cross) had become exasperated and turned off the receiver.

Mrs. Manresa let out a shriek of protest, of anguish, of loss. By the reflexive habit of his long years of missionary work, Monsignor Beefheart had released the HOLD button at the same time he'd touched OFF. Now, should he so choose, Bobolink could disconnect. And he would, she knew it; he would.

But he didn't. When she'd shoved the monsignor out of the way and turned the set back on, he was still there, glorious (even in Norm's spiteful version) in swim trunks, faithful as a bad penny. Had he known he'd had a chance to make a break for it? His sudden smile when she'd reappeared on his screen would suggest that he had. At the very least she knew, just by the fact that she'd reached him again, that *his* receiver was on HOLD. He'd *told* her it was, but she'd never dared put his word to the test. Now she knew it wasn't a lie: *he* had *her* on HOLD!

He loves me, she thought, he really does, and all the while Monsignor Beefheart was apologizing to Xavier for his brusqueness and explaining that it did not seem to possess the kind of ethical sensibility suitable for its becoming a Christian. To be received into the Church, one must display more

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than a fascination with bilateral symmetry. Some concept of original sin was much more essential, and that Xavier, by its own admission, lacked entirely. Perhaps, Monsignor Beefheart suggested, gasbags were not subject to original sin, but you could tell from the way he said it that he was only being polite.

Xavier took its rejection with every evidence of good humor, though it did seem to want to go on and finish its retelling of the story of the fox with eight legs, then four legs, and finally only three.

That night in her room at the Hassleer, when they were alone, Bobolink tried to get Mrs. Manresa to take one of the wafers from the packet of Holy Communion the nun had given her at St. Peter's. "Oh, come on," he wheedled, "just for fun, come on." She said she was too tired. He said she owed it to him for having kept his receiver on HOLD. He knew she hadn't believed him before, but now she had the proof. She said maybe tomorrow. He said now. Finally she agreed to take just one, and finally she took it. After the initial lift-off, Bobolink began telling her how much, how very much he loved her, and how, loving her so much, he also needed her trust. She believed every word. With the amount of Faith there was in one wafer she'd have believed anything — a mystery, a miracle, an oxymoron. Beyond believing Bobolink, she trusted him and did what he had asked: she took her receiver off HOLD.

He didn't disconnect. Faith was triumphant.

He told her how wholly, how utterly he loved her. He said she was his darling girl, his goddess, his little goose, his All-in-All.

She believed him.

She adored him.

She promised, faithfully, to take another wafer in the morning, and he promised to leave his own receiver on HOLD for ever and ever and ever and ever and ever.

V

Mrs. Manresa stayed on in the Eternal City for what seemed, under the influence of her daily dose of Faith, an eternal seven weeks. She divided her timeless hours between her darling, her deity, her Bobolink, paddling by steamer across the orange Medean sea from flotilla to flotilla, and doing the standard sights of Rome —the Pantheon, the Colosseum, the Sistine Chapel, St. Peter's, and the reconstructed Forum-*cum*-Funfair in E.U.R. — always the same itinerary, since that was what the audiences on Medea paid to see.

Bobolink had become an impresario. Though the divorce between Earth and Medea had come to an end and he no longer had a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

monopoly on communications between the two worlds, the naive lucidity of Mrs. Manresa's perceptions made her an ideal medium for conveying that sense of wonder and razzmatazz that is the *raison d'etre* of baroque architecture. Sometimes she'd do a special tour for Catholic audiences, going exclusively to churches, starting at the Scala Santa, where she climbed the Holy Staircase on her knees, proceeding thence to Santa Maria d'Aracoeli, then to Santa Maria degli Angeli, then to Santa Maria della Pace, then to Santa Maria dell'Anima, then (after a quick lunch) to Santa Maria in Cosmedin, then out on the 57 bus to Santa Maria del Populo, and winding up at 1600 on the dot at Santa Maria Maggiore, for which round of visits she and each of the vicarious pilgrims in her audience on Medea received a plenary indulgence.

Naturally with so much Faith in her system and such a plethora of pious sights to take in, Mrs. Manresa was soon an ardent Catholic. She felt a special devotion to the Virgin Mary, particularly as represented by Pinturicchio in the *Adoration* at Santa Maria del Populo, to whom she was thought (by her audiences) to bear a remarkable resemblance. This devotion was not without practical repercussions.

"You see, beloved," she explained once more to Bobolink, during one of her hurried lunch breaks before hastening on to Santa Maria in Cosmedin, "I understand now what I never understood before. It's a woman's *destiny* to bear children and nourish them with her love. Her fulfillment. Her sacred duty. That's clear, isn't it, now that I've explained? You see the logic of it?"

"Absolutely." There was no point in arguing with someone strung out on Faith. You just had to agree.

"Then you will help me, won't you?"

"Darling, you *know* how much I love you."

In reply Mrs. Manresa pressed adoring lips to the screen of her receiver.

"But I don't see why, in a case like this, it has to be me who, uh, supplies the...."

Mrs. Manresa laughed delightedly. "But who else, silly dear, could I possibly have a child by?"

"Maybe your husband?"

"But I don't *love* Howard. I must have my child by the man I love. By the man who loves me."

"Yeah, naturally. I just thought, seeing that you're a Catholic now...."

"Oh, as to that, Monsignor Beefheart has made it very clear that the Church doesn't recognize the validity of marriage to a handyman. He said my relationship to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Howard is essentially a business arrangement."

"And what is your relationship to me?"

Mrs. Manresa furrowed her brow in distress. What could he mean asking such a question? She was his darling, his deity, his —

"I love you, of course," he assured her. "Nobody could possibly love you more than I do. You must know that."

"Oh, yes!"

"But, after all, ours has to be a spiritual-type love, right? Considering that we're fifty light-years apart."

"Yes, but you see if you'll just transmit the data they need at the Family Planning Center — I've got all the forms you need —"

"I know, I know. The problem is, dearest, that it requires rather a major effort to get the kind of information those forms are asking for, especially here on Medea. As I've explained so often before, we've devolved. We don't have the technology available. I can't just go into a booth and let them take a sample. I'd have to go to the main office of the Human Bureau at Port Backside, and it would cost me a small fortune."

"But, as I recall, that's where we're going. Aren't I doing two matinees at the Backside Civic Theater next week?"

"Mm."

"And as for the money, darling, you must be *earning* a great deal of money. Whatever it may cost, surely you wouldn't withhold my womanly fulfillment from me?"

She did not need to point out by whose help he was scooping up the bracques. No pimp along the Lungotevere could have been more sensibly aware of the source of his income. At last, seeing the practical wisdom of keeping his goose in a laying humor (for, when she was anxious, the quality of her transmissions plummeted disastrously), he agreed to go along with her numskull scheme, and as soon as they reached Port Backside, he went to the Human Bureau and had them take a genetic scan. The results of the scan were transmitted via their own receivers, from the Medean data bank at the Human Bureau directly to Family Planning Center in Rome.

At first, Mrs. Manresa had favored leaving the genetic mix entirely to chance in the old-fashioned way (except for sex, since she definitely wanted a son: is there a Madonna anywhere who doesn't?), but then at the twenty-third hour she changed her mind and let Bobolink's most salient physical characteristics be dominant. It cost more, but that's love.

Birth was simulated a week after conception. What was the point of pretending to be pregnant?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That, however, she had promised herself, would be the last she'd let herself tamper with nature's inalterable rhythms. What she hadn't bargained on was the inchoate flux of infantile perception. She'd programmed her Baby Jesus — in the records of the Family Planning Center his name was Robin, but to his mother he would always be Baby Jesus — to be born and bred on Medea. That way, her only communication with him would be by receiver, just as it had been with his father. After all, if he could never be more than an image on a screen, then to have him seem to be on the screen of a receiver rather than an ordinary simulator screen might actually enhance one's sense of his actuality. Such had been her theory. In practice, alas, Baby Jesus came across as little more than a booming pink blob. Simulated babies have self-concepts as dim and unfocused as those of real biological babies. The first year or so of even the sacredest motherhood is only the sum of hundreds of hours of stroking, squeezing, nursing, burping, dandling, and changing diapers. All these vital attentions were duly paid to Baby Jesus, but only in simulation and by his adoptive Medean mother, Octave. Until he learned to talk, there wasn't much his real mother could do to relate to him except to make faces at him as he lay in his crib.

If, on the one hand, Baby Jesus was a bit of a disappointment, he did not, on the other, make many demands, while Bobolink definitely did. Mrs. Manresa was now conducting two chautauquas a day — one in the afternoon for school assemblies, one in the evening for the general public.

It was hard, even with Faith, to maintain an alert interest in what she'd never understood to begin with. St. Peter's was immense, she couldn't deny it, but *why* was it immense? How did its immensity relate to the grander but less tangible immensity of God? She believed in God now, thanks to her Faith, and in Jesus and Mary and everything else, but there didn't seem to be much *connection* between what she believed in and what she could see about her here in Rome. She wished she could slow down for a minute and find out why, for instance, one set of columns and pillars and cornices was supposed to be so much better than another, aside from their being older or made of an especially nice kind of rock, and what that had to do with loving her neighbors, or even meeting them. She began to feel what she'd never felt before, a vague disquiet with her own unmodified, unevolved condition, a longing to be able to plug into an information terminal whenever she wanted to and, bing, have the answers to at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

least a few of these questions. Baby Jesus ought to have been a refuge and a strength, but he just wasn't.

Neither, sad to say, was Bobolink. She *believed* in him: he left her no choice. She believed, that is, what he told her to — that he loved her, that he needed her, that she was his darling, his deity, his All-in-All. It never seemed to occur to him to tell her that *she* loved *him*, etc. She did, of course, but possibly not in the ardent way he seemed to assume. He was too modest, or maybe too innately honest, to take advantage of her Faith to achieve an apotheosis for himself. He remained the proud failure and aging bum she'd originally fallen in love with, which was painful at times, but doesn't the Mater Dolorosa have seven swords piercing her heart? That's love and she had to be grateful for it, even if it meant, which it seemed to, that she was slowly going crazy as a result.

Monsignor Beefheart made it all very clear one afternoon when he came over to her hotel to hear her confession.

"Your dilemma, my dear Mrs. Manresa, is that you're being asked to entertain two mutually contradictory systems of belief, each of them capable quite on its own of driving a more delicately constituted mind than yours right around the bend. One is Christianity; the other a more than usually meritricious romantic passion. You'll have to give up one or the other. What *I* suggest is that you let me take away your receiver and that you stay here in Rome and join a missionary order of nuns."

"What would I do about Baby Jesus?"

"Baby Jesus — *your* Baby Jesus, that is — doesn't exist. He's a computer simulation, a set of statistical possibilities coded onto a wire filament."

"That's easy for you to say — you're not his mother."

"Mrs. Manresa, think about what you've just said."

"I can't help it. It's the Faith, it makes me confused."

"Faith, Mrs. Manresa, is ultimately an act of free will. No one forced you to take that first pill. You took it because you wanted to believe in that lout on a third-rate planet who is exploiting you for his own selfish ends."

"But what is the difference between that and what you're suggesting? As a missionary nun I'd just go on giving more guided tours of Rome to people on other inaccessible planets. Wouldn't I?"

"Yes, but you'd be doing it for the greater glory of God."

The receiver buzzed.

Mrs. Manresa sighed. "There he is now. We better get dressed. I've got to be at the Pantheon in fifteen minutes."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Whatever you say. *Absolvo te.*"

"Thanks." She kissed his bald spot. "The same to you."

Long before Mrs. Manresa could be driven functionally insane, her contractions were resolved in the simplest way possible. Bobolink hung up.

She had sensed for several weeks already that there had been a growing dissatisfaction with her transmissions among the members of her audience. Bobolink kept urging her to pay closer attention, but how much attention, after all, can you give to the same pile of tumble-down stones twice a day, day in and day out? On the circuit of Santa Marias her difficulty seemed not so much apathy or jadedness as an excess of credulity. The paintings and statues and frescoed ceilings came across not as ancient and intellectually improving works of art but as the real thing. To such as did not share her Faith, Mrs. Manresa's veritable angels and windblown stone saints looked a little ludicrous; even, eventually, embarrassing, especially among Catholics who were suddenly brought up against the brute demands of their religion. Word got around, and in even the most isolated flotillas her audiences diminished until the show was no longer paying for Bobolink's traveling expenses. At which point, without so much as a thank you or a word of farewell, he was gone.

She had found out by turning on her receiver one day at noon when she was due to start the day's excursion. Usually by that time Bobolink would have buzzed her, but sometimes he just waited till she was ready. With both sets off HOLD, the scanning mechanism, which she'd almost forgotten about, started thumbing through the pages of hyperspace looking for somebody new. Before she'd been able to take in what had happened, she'd reached a hard-bitten old lady astronaut somewhere at the other end of the universe who wanted to tell her about the dreams she'd been having. Mrs. Manresa listened to her with dazed inattention, and then, as it finally sank in that she'd been abandoned and that this was a fact no amount of Faith was ever going to change, she started to cry.

The astronaut looked offended and hung up.

VI

It was Labor Day, and Mrs. Manresa had baked a traditional Labor Day loaf. There it lay, golden and crusty, on the luncheonette ledge, waiting to be sliced.

She switched on the simulator and touched the buzzer. Without a pause Octave answered. Mrs. Man-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

resa had often called up the F.P.C. and suggested that in future programs the simulated figures might sometimes seem to be delayed in answering a call, or even, occasionally, to be unavailable. It would definitely make them seem more lifelike.

Octave was wearing a holiday apron that she'd copied from one of Mrs. Manresa's. It was decorated with a set of cheery silk french fries that looked, through the simulated eyes of Octave, good enough to eat. They chatted for a while. Octave liked to hear the latest economic indicators, which meant that Mrs. Manresa had to keep abreast of the news more than she cared to. Then Octave lugged her set to another part of the room, and Mrs. Manresa was able to see, still through Octave's eyes, her darling and only-begotten son.

Baby Jesus was sprawled on the floor beside a low serving table, playing in a desultory way with a doll fashioned from fragments of a desiccated gasbag. He was four years old, though scarcely as many weeks had passed since Mrs. Manresa had returned to Marshall Avenue and her career as a housewife. In her eagerness for companionship she had not been able to resist accelerating Baby Jesus's growth. The Family Planning Center had warned that the result of such haste might be a certain flatness of personality, a stunting of affective range. So much of the illusion of a simulation's autonomous life depends on a sustained interaction between program and programmer. To rely entirely on normative probabilities, as one did in accelerating growth, was liable to make Jack a dull boy; and this seeming dullness would, in turn, encourage his parent/programmer to continue acceleration in the hope of reaching a more interesting and interactive phase of development. Mrs. Manresa was already caught in this vicious circle, though, like most disappointed parents, she tended to place the blame for her mistake elsewhere — on the designers at the Family Planning Center, on his foster-mother, on Baby Jesus himself. In her clearer-headed moments she recognized the unfairness of this, but it is hard, when you're insanely depressed and living half of your life in an elevator, to be even moderately clear-headed.

Now, however, she meant to turn over a new leaf. For four tedious hours, after she'd done the morning's dusting and adjusting and other needful chores, she had sat down and viewed IBM's highly recommended cassette on child guidance. There were five important rules to follow. The first was: Share Basic Experience. Such as, today, the Labor Day loaf. She ar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ranged in advance for Octave to bake a loaf using the same recipe, and there it was on the table in front of Baby Jesus, the Doppelganger of her own real loaf of bread. He would eat some and she would eat some and each of them would know that what they were experiencing; the crunch of the crust, the flavor on their tongues, was identical and just the same. There was nothing like shared meals, so the experts at IBM claimed, for overcoming one's basic disbelief in the existence of other people. This was why, even though it was so unpleasant to watch other people chewing their food, almost every religious system required its followers to eat meals together, especially when they belonged to the same kinship group.

Baby Jesus, however, had a finicky and unpredictable appetite, and this was one of his most obstinate days. No amount of coaxing or pleading would get him to try some of the Labor Day loaf. Octave smeared on thick spoonfuls of his favorite substitute, but still he balked. At last he had a tantrum. Mrs. Manresa put up with his nonsense as long as she could stand it and then hung up.

She advanced the simulation one day of calendar time and tried again.

This time it was Baby Jesus who answered. There he stood, on the outer deck of the houseboat, a crude little scribble of a mannikin with one big red daub of a body to which were attached four matchstick limbs and a smaller pink daub of a head: the self-concept of a two-year-old, according to the IBM cassette. Behind him, the orange sea and the red disk of Argo aglow in the violet sky seemed overlaid with a faint gridiron pattern — the effect, one might surmise, of his precocious enthusiasm for chess. When she'd been helping the F.P.C. to set up his original program, the only definite and distinctive fact she'd been able to remember about Octave was that she liked to play chess. Now, when she asked Baby Jesus what he would like to do, the answer was invariably that he wanted to play chess.

They set out the pieces on their boards. His came across with diagrammatic clarity; more clearly, indeed, than the veritable plastic pieces on her own board, unless she looked very hard.

While they played, Mrs. Manresa tried to engineer the conversation into IBM's recommended channels with the object of getting Baby Jesus to pay closer attention to shapes and colors in the world around him besides those incorporated into the chessboard and its pieces.

"Oh, look. How strange. Do you see those two dots?" she asked, re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ferring to Phrixus and Helle, the double sun of the Colchis system.

"What two dots?" Baby Jesus asked abstractedly, not looking up from the chessboard.

"There in the sky, by the Kingsley's ventilator." (She had seen the same scene through Octave's eyes and knew, therefore, that a certain brown protuberance was a ventilator on the roof of a neighboring barge.)

"Don't know." He moved his queen forward, capturing his mother's king's bishop's pawn. "You're in check."

With a sigh of disappointment she turned the simulator off.

It was all very well, she thought bitterly, for people like IBM to talk about low resolution and high involvement. *They* didn't have to live with an emotional cretin. *They* didn't have to look at those two empty eyes and the inflexible minus-sign of a mouth and say to themselves: *this* is my reason for living, *this* is what's left of all my love.

A week later, after a fit of impatience and pique in which she'd booted Baby Jesus two years further ahead into his subjective future without effecting the least improvement in his self-concept, Mrs. Manresa took a walk through the yellow pages and found the number of Mrs. Bellamy's School for Imaginary Children. Like so many others involved in conceptual occupation, Mrs. Bellamy insisted on Mrs. Manresa's coming to her place of business in person.

The School for Imaginary Children was a smallish indoors shopfront on the second level of Dayton's Psycholgical Services Bureau on Wabasha Avenue. A photo-enlargement of two pages from an old abecedary filled the single window and prevented passers-by from looking in. Feeling she ought to take an interest in the display, Mrs. Manresa pressed the read-aloud button at the side of the window. A concealed speaker read the text in a scratchy, worn-out voice:

A is an Apple, as everyone knows.
But B is a.... What do you suppose?
A Bible? A Barber? A Banquet? A Bank?
No, B is this Boat, the night that it sank.
C is its Captain, and D is its Dory,
While E— But first let me tell you a story.

"Can I help you?" said a slightly modified old woman (her gray permahair did not quite conceal the socket at the base of her neck), emerging from the shop. The read-aloud button must have alerted her.

Mrs. Manresa explained that she was Mrs. Manresa.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, yes. Do come in. I trust you've brought your little boy with you?"

Mrs. Manresa followed Mrs. Bellamy into a cubicle set up just like a school room in an old movie, with blackboards and bunting and four rows of darling little desks just two feet high. On the back of the giant abecedary in the shop window were taped a number of bona fide finger paintings in reassuring pairs of foggy or psychotic Befores and inventive but undisturbed Afters. If only (she thought) the school could improve her own son so dramatically.

"This is —" She took the spool of tape from her carryall and handed it to Mrs. Bellamy. "—Baby Jesus."

Mrs. Bellamy glanced at the logo on the spool. "From the Family Planning Center? I'm surprised, I must say. Their programs seldom require assistance of the sort we offer here."

"The fault is mine, I'm afraid. I made him grow too fast. He's become ... reclusive. Also, his self-concept is very poor for his age."

"Which is?" Mrs. Bellamy inquired.

"Just turned six."

"Dear me." She checked the date on the spool. "You *have* been impatient. But still, six is a good age to start school, and the influence of other independently programmed children can do wonders. Now if I may ask you a few questions?"

"Certainly."

Mrs. Bellamy turned to the blackboard, took up a piece of chalk, and wrote a numeral 1. "First, your occupation?"

"I'm a housewife."

"Really! I always wanted to be a housewife when I was a girl, but —" With a martyred smile. "— I guess I just wasn't cut out for it." She wrote a numeral 2 on the blackboard. "Your husband's occupation?"

"Ordinarily, he's a data-flow coagulator for Honeywell, but he's been on sabbatical for most of this year, making mechanical music boxes. That's how we happen to have time available, on his supplemental banks, to program a child."

"Is this the first child you've had together?"

"Oh, he's not Howard's child."

"No?" Mrs. Bellamy hastily erased the 2 on the blackboard and sat down on the floor.

Mrs. Manresa sat down beside her and unfolded the whole long tale, how she'd met Bobolink and fallen in love, how she'd flown to Rome and been converted accidentally to Catholicism, how Baby Jesus had been born, how Bobolink had abandoned her, and then, in simulation, abandoned his own son as well. "And so you see," Mrs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Manresa concluded, "why Baby Jesus is so important to me. He's all I have left."

"Yes, I see. May I ask — and please don't be offended — have you ever considered going back to conception and starting over? A new genetic mix can yield amazing results, and it would be much cheaper, you know, than entering him in the school. A separate tape must be developed for each of his classmates, each of which, like his own, must be coordinated with all the data currently available about the world he's growing up on."

"I realize it will be expensive, but I feel it would be like murdering him if I went back and started from scratch. And then, as IBM points out, I'm liable to make all the same mistakes over again. Most parents do."

"True, true."

"What I'm sure he needs most is just to meet other children. Children with other backgrounds. Children he can play with."

"Undoubtedly," said Mrs. Bellamy, though without notable conviction. "One final question: does your son understand, how shall I put it —" She patted her hair down in place over the socket in her neck. "— the facts of life?"

"As much as any other six-year-old, I suppose. He's not stupid. Just ... untrusting."

"What I'm driving at, Mrs. Manresa, is that many imaginary children who grow up on planets far from Earth undergo a great shock when they realize that it would have been impossible for their parents to have met and, in the Biblical sense, known each other."

"Oh, that's not a problem with Baby Jesus. I'm a clone, you see. Ova of my exact genotype are available for transplantation at any office of the Human Bureau. All anyone would have to know in order to be able to have a child by me is my name."

"And your son understands that?"

"Yes, of course."

"Good. Then all that remains is to discuss what kind of classmates you'd like for Baby Jesus. And, by the way, I'd suggest that he adopt some more ordinary name when he does start attending. Children can be merciless teases. And, after all that, I'll show you our schedule of tuition fees."

VII

The spool came back from the School for Imaginary Children four weeks later. In those four weeks Baby Jesus had spent seven months, subjectively, at the Port Backside Military Academy. With a prayer to her favorite Pinturicchio Madonna and crossing her fingers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for good luck, Mrs. Manresa swallowed one of the last remaining wafers of Faith, inserted the spool into the simulator, and waited (scarcely a moment) for Baby Jesus to answer.

It was clear at a glance how great a change the school had wrought in the boy's self-concept. No more did he look like a puddle of finger paint. Every limb, every finger, every feature of his face was delineated with sharp black lines, and each area thus demarcated was filled in with bright plausible colors. It was exactly the kind of self-concept the cassette said was to be expected from a child of his age.

"Darling," said Mrs. Manresa, feeling the delicious pressure of happy tears.

"Oh, it's you," said Baby Jesus.

"Yes, of course, dear. Who did you think? Oh, sweetheart, I'm so delighted to see you. It's been so long. Did you like your school? Were you happy there? Did you make a lot of friends?"

"I suppose so."

"You're *looking* so good, dear. I wish so much I could be there beside you. I'd pick you up and give you such a *squeeze.*"

"Would you?" he asked.

"Yes, and then I'd take you to the best restaurant on Medea, and we'd have a lovely celebration to welcome you back home. Just the two of us. Would you like that?"

He shook his head.

She smiled. The school had not, after all, reformed him out of recognition.

"What *would* you like then?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing I can think of."

"Is something wrong?"

Baby Jesus regarded his mother coldly.

"If there is, don't you think you should try and talk about it? Maybe I can help you."

"No." He shook his head more emphatically. "You couldn't."

"Did something happen at the academy?"

"The academy?" he repeated scornfully. "*What* academy?"

She deflected the question with a self-defensive smile.

"There *isn't* any academy. It doesn't exist. *I* don't exist. Nothing exists. Except maybe you. And I don't think you exist either. I hope you don't."

"Oh, Baby Jesus, darling — who *ever* told you such a thing?"

"*All* the other kids knew, all of them. And it's true, isn't it. We're just a lot of tapes spinning around inside some old computer. Aren't we? *Aren't* we?"

"No! No, you're my son. You know that."

"And that's why my father went away. Because *he* knew that's all he was. He was a grown-up, so it didn't take him long to figure out."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Where is Octave, Baby Jesus? I'd like to talk with her a moment."

"She doesn't exist either."

"Why don't we let her decide that for herself? Now where is she?"

"You want to see?" Baby Jesus trundled the simulated receiver (his image on the screen swayed realistically) into the simulated houseboat. Octave was lying on the floor in a perfect ellipse of bright red blood.

"You've killed her." Somehow she knew Octave, even a simulated Octave, would not have had the courage to kill herself.

He nodded. "She asked me to." He pointed to a bloodstained bread knife lying on the kitchen table. "With that. She said she knew, when I told her, she was just the same as me. She knew she wasn't real."

"But she was real, and so are you. So is everything. Just look around you. Touch the bowl on the table."

"*You* touch it."

Mrs. Manresa switched off the simulator.

The Faith was doing terrible things to her system. She believed in Baby Jesus. She knew he was real. She had the evidence of her senses and the testimony of her heart. At the same time she knew he was only a simulation.

She advanced the tape four hours, and then, thinking that might not be long enough, another four hours.

No one answered her buzz.

She knew she'd been defeated. With a last regretful look at the white dots flickering on the simulator's screen, she locked the keyboard in the ALL position and pushed ERASE. With the pressure of a fingertip she murdered Baby Jesus.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WHERE IS EVERYBODY?

My beautiful, blue-eyed, blonde-haired daughter, who just yesterday (as I write this) received her college diploma, with myself waving and shrieking madly from the stands, is a constant source of stories concerning the reactions to her name.

Recently, she was stuck in an airplane that was delayed over two hours before taking off. She couldn't get off to call me about the delay, and she knew I was expecting her to arrive at her destination at a certain time and to call me, at that time, to let me know that she had arrived safely. She knew well that I would be upset at the unexplained delay and she felt annoyed at this.

A kindly businessman in the next seat went out of his way to occupy her mind and keep her calm by engaging her in lively conversation. Finally, he asked her what this father of hers (concerning whose peace of mind she seemed so concerned) did for a living.

"He's a writer," said Robyn.

"What does he write?" asked the businessman.

"Well, he's best known for his science fiction."

"You mean the kind of stuff Asimov writes?"

"Exactly. In fact, he *is* Asimov."

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sensation!

When things calmed down, the businessman said, "Tell me something. How did your father know, when he began to write science fiction, that he was going to be successful?"

It was a logical question from a business point of view. After all, if an enterprise doesn't promise success, you don't undertake it.

—And, alas, that is the same attitude that many "practical" men take toward a scientific project that requires vision extending an inch or two past the tip of one's nose. For instance, the notion of a search for extraterrestrial intelligence seems like a boondoggle to them, even though, as I explained in last month's essay, one can reason out, legitimately enough, the good possibility that as many as 50,000,000 technological civilizations have gotten their start here and there in our Galaxy.

To be sure, my reasoning of last month is not sufficient, in itself, to allow me to wax merrily sarcastic at the expense of those who doubt a search for extraterrestrial intelligence will succeed. I ended the essay with the statement that there was one question I had not yet taken into account, but I didn't say what the question was.

Here it is: "Where is everybody?"

If there are 50,000,000 technological civilizations more advanced than ourselves, why haven't we heard from them? Why haven't they visited us? Why is everything so quiet?

Let's consider the possible answers to the question.

1) *There may be some serious mistake in my reasoning in last month's essay, and it may be that there are, after all, no technological civilizations anywhere but on Earth.*

But where can the mistake be? We *know* there are a vast number of stars and that a substantial portion of them are Sun-like. We have good reason to believe that planetary systems are common and, if so, there should be, just by sheer chance, a goodly number of Earth-like planets. We have good reason to believe that life is an all but inevitable development, and in that case why shouldn't intelligence and civilization be found as a reasonably common development of life?

Where, then, could we have gone wrong?

If despite all these sound arguments, a civilization exists only on the Earth, then there must be something very unusual about the Earth that we haven't taken into account; some characteristic we are not likely to find on other planets that, superficially, may seem Earth-like. But if so, what can it be?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What about the Moon?

It is enormous. It has 1/81 the mass of the planet it circles. There are five other planets with satellites, but in every case, those satellites are tiny compared to their primary.

The Earth-Moon system is virtually a double planet. It is as though it formed out of the original nebula about a double nucleus, while all the other planets formed about a single nucleus with some inconsiderable remnants clotting on the outskirts.

Is the double-nucleus origin so rare that it virtually never happens* and does it contribute, somehow, to making Earth a life-bearing planet?

After all, Venus has just about the same size, mass, density, and composition as the Earth, yet it is totally hostile to life as we know it — and it has no satellite.

Does this mean that all the hundred million Earth-like planets we postulated last month are really Venus-like planets, and that only our Earth, alone among them all, is Earth-like and can support life? If so, last month's reasoning falls to the ground.

Yet why should we think that the mere formation of the Moon can turn a Venus into a Earth? In fact, it makes much more sense to think of Venus as hostile and Earth as benign because Venus is a bit too close to the Sun.

It is not even certain that the Moon was formed out of the same dust cloud from which Earth was formed. Earth may well have begun life as a single planet. The Moon may have formed as a single planet, too, but may have been captured by the Earth — perhaps late in Earth's life.

After all, the Moon has only three-fifths the density of Earth and lacks a metal core. It is much more like Mars in these respects than like Earth, so that perhaps it was formed out of the Martian portion of the original cloud.

Then, too, it lacks the more volatile elements, and bits of glassy materials, formed by rocky substances that have melted and re-solidified, are common on it, though rare on the Earth. It may have been subjected to Mercurian heat at some time in the past.

Perhaps the Moon had an eccentric orbit, originally, that brought it to a Mercurian approach to the Sun at perihelion, and a Martian recession at aphelion. Then, at some time, thanks to some tricky bit of celestial mechanics, Earth captured it.

Would that have made a difference? Is there any sharp revolution in

Since writing this, Pluto has been found to have a satellite and to be a double planet. I'll take that up in a future issue.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Earth's development that took place last in its history?

How about the development of land life? Life in the ocean began perhaps 0.5 billion years after the Earth was formed, but life on land appeared 4.2 billion years after. Why the 3.7-billion-year wait?

Perhaps tides are the secret to land life. The periodic progression of water up a shore and then down again, would carry life with it. It would leave pools behind in which some forms of life could flourish. There would be water-soaked sands that could become hospitable to life. Adaptations would make it possible for life-forms to withstand limited amounts of drying between one high tide and the next. These would creep further and further up the shore until finally life was possible without any actual immersion in water at any time.

A Moonless Earth, however, would have only the small tides produced by the Sun—one-third the amplitude of the tides we now have. These might have been insufficient to get land life started.

If, however, the Moon were captured 400,000,000 years ago, tides would suddenly become markedly greater in amplitude. In fact, they must have been greater in amplitude then than they are now. Tidal action is slowing the Earth's rotation and driving the Moon farther from the Earth. Working backward, we can show that 400,000,000 years ago, the day was only about 21.8 hours long and the Moon was only 320,000 kilometers (200,000 miles) from Earth.

The closer Moon produced tides 1.7 times as great in amplitude as it does today, and these would move up and down the shores at a speed ten percent greater than at present, thanks to the shorter day.

We might conclude, then, that it was the tides produced by a large captured satellite that made land life possible.

We can also argue that it is only on land that life can develop the long-distance vision and the manipulative organs that make a large brain and a high intelligence possible.* What's more, it is only on land, and in a free-oxygen atmosphere that fire is possible, and it is the control of fire that is the beginning of a high technology.

Consequently, unless an Earth-like planet captures a large satellite (and the chances of that are so small that no one has yet figured out how Earth could have managed to do so) the best a planet can hope for is sea life. That would mean that although life-bearing planets are as common as I estimated in the previous chapter, *civilization*-bearing planets would

**Dolphins may be intelligent, but they had land-living ancestors. The most intelligent creatures whose ancestors have always been sea-living are the octopi.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be extremely rare, and Earth might even be the only one in the Galaxy.

This, however, is not a compelling argument, either. We are not at all sure the Moon was captured. What's more, tides may not be the crucial factor in the development of land life. It is much more persuasive to argue that the land became habitable only after enough free oxygen had been pumped into the atmosphere by photosynthetic organisms to make an ozone layer possible in the upper atmosphere so that the deadly ultraviolet rays of the Sun could be blocked off. Until that happened, sea life was protected by the uppermost layer of water, but land life had no protection at all.

Consequently, it may not be the Moon was crucial in either the formation of life generally, or the formation of land life in particular. What's more, I can't really see that Earth is intrinsically remarkable in any way other than in the possession of an unbelievably large satellite, and so we must *still* maintain that 50,000 extra-terrestrial civilizations have come into being in our Galaxy.

2. *Wait! They "came into being..." Who says that they stay in being?*

Suppose that each civilization that comes into being lasts for only a comparatively short time and then comes to an end. That would mean that if we could examine all the Earth-like planets in the Galaxy we might find that on a large number of them, civilizations have not yet arisen and that, on an even larger number, civilizations have arisen and have already become extinct. On only a few planets would we arrive at a time when a civilization had arisen so recently that it had not yet had time to become extinct.

The briefer the duration of civilizations on the average the less likely we are to encounter a world on which civilization has come and not yet gone, and the fewer civilizations *in being* there will be at this moment — or at any given moment in the history of the Galaxy.

Might it be, then, that civilizations are self-limiting and that the reason none of them have visited us is that none of them have remained in existence long enough to make the visit possible?

But why should a species intelligent enough to form a civilization not be intelligent enough to survive?

Judging from the experience of the one species we know that is capable of civilization — our own — we might argue that the mere possession of high intelligence means there is foresight and memory. We can foresee the possibility of discomfort and deprivation, and we can remember having

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been subjected to discomfort and deprivation. We therefore compete with far more violence and persistence than less intelligent species do for desired objects that are scarce and, if we lose, we are much more likely than they to seek revenge. This is not because we are worse than other species; merely more intelligent.

Contentiousness and violence, in other words, comes with the territory and, as intelligence multiples the force at the disposal of an intelligent species, the violence grows steadily more deadly. Finally, the time comes when the weapons of the intelligent species are so powerful and destructive that they outstrip the capacity of the species to recover and rebuild — and the civilization automatically comes to an end. Even if, long after, the species rebuilds, or an entirely new intelligent species arises, suicide again comes as the end.

Homo sapiens appeared on this planet about 600,000 years ago and may be, as a civilization, on the point of extinction. If we assume that the Sun will remain on the main sequence and be capable of maintaining Earth in its habitable state for a total of 12,000,000,000 years, then humanity, existing for 600,000 years, will have maintained itself for 1/20,000 the lifetime of the Earth.

If there are a hundred million Earth-like planets in the Galaxy, as I suggested last month, and if our history is typical of intelligent species generally, then on only 5,000 of them is there an intelligent species capable of constructing a civilization which has not yet had time to commit suicide — and none of these are more advanced than we, or they would already be extinct.

By this line of argument, then, it is no wonder that we have never been visited by extraterrestrial intelligences.

We can, with particularly deadly significance, use an argument in reverse: A) Many extraterrestrial intelligences must have established civilization, as we reasoned last month. B) None have come to visit us. C) Therefore, all have destroyed themselves before they gained the capacity to come visiting, and we ourselves have no chance of avoiding self-destruction, either.

—Yet how can we be sure that our own experience is typical of tens of millions of others? Isn't it possible that at least some intelligent species may use their collective intelligence to foresee the suicide and modify their behavior accordingly? Isn't it even possible that we ourselves may yet do so?

Suppose, for instance, we estimate that there is one chance in ten that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that we will cooperate, as a species, in the face of destruction, try to solve our problems, control our population, conserve our resources, reverse pollution, and so on. We will then survive as a civilization, though perhaps at a high cost, and, in the end, rebuild what damage is done and progress onward for eons perhaps, on a new and better basis.

In that case, we might argue that 1 out of every 10 extra-terrestrial civilizations would survive and persist for extended periods.

We might therefore maintain that out of the 50,000,000 extra-terrestrial civilizations that come into being, 5,000,000 would be long-lived.

In other words, even a pessimistic assessment of our own future does not altogether eliminate the possibility that there are millions of extraterrestrial civilizations now in existence, each of them advanced far beyond us in technology.

This brings us back to our original question. Where is everybody?

3. *It could be that there's no practical way of visiting us.*

If there are, let us say, 5,000,000 long-lived extraterrestrial civilizations in the Galaxy right now, that means that about 1 out of 30,000 stars shines down on a long-lived extraterrestrial civilization. In the regions of the Galaxy where such civilizations are likely to occur, the average separation between stars is 9.2 light-years. The average separation between extraterrestrial civilizations would then be 9.2 times the cube root of 30,000, or 285 light-years.

If we take 285 light-years as the most probable distance to even the nearest extraterrestrial civilization, you can see that visiting us would be quite a chore.

After all, as far as we know now, the speed of light is the absolute limit as far as the speed of transportation or communication is concerned. The round trip from one civilization to its neighbor and back, allowing for the need to accelerate and decelerate, would surely be, at best, 1,000 years.

Even if it is not a matter of travelling, but communication by radio or its equivalent, the time lapse for any exchange of informations between two neighboring civilizations would take, on the average, 570 years. All this could well be considered more trouble than it was worth.

There have been speculations, to be sure, that the speed-of-light limit can be circumvented by the use of tachyons or of black holes, but such things are entirely speculative, and there is a strong temptation to suppose that while millions of extraterrestrial civilizations might exist, each might

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be confined, both by natural law and by choice, to their own planetary systems.

In fact, we may again use an argument in reverse: A) There are undoubtedly millions of long-lived civilizations in the Galaxy. B) None have ever come to visit us. C) The speed of light is an absolute limit and will never be circumvented.

Yet I would be hard put to answer those who maintain that an advanced technological civilization is bound to find an answer to the speed-of-light limitation. Just because *we* don't see the answer means nothing. A primitive society speculating on the possibility of communicating with other societies thousands of miles away might carefully calculate the endurance required of runners and the time it would take to complete the round trip; and might consider the loudness required of drum-signals to allow them to be heard at so great a distance; and come to the conclusion that there was no practical way, even in theory, in which such communication could be established. They would never conceive of either jet planes or radio.

Well, then, assume that the advanced technologies can do easily what we cannot even imagine and that they find it neither too troublesome nor too expensive to travel among the stars.

Then where is everybody?

We might argue that as the intelligences come out of their planetary systems, they war on each other to the point of mutual destruction.

This does not seem likely. If they are that warlike, they would not have survived to reach the stage of interstellar travel. If they had managed to survive to that stage and were nevertheless warlike, the first and most advanced technology would most likely have destroyed all other burgeoning civilizations, colonized all suitable planets, and a one-species Galactic Empire would be now in existence.

The very fact that we are here, developing without outside interference would indicate there is no such conquering faster-than-light civilization.

Perhaps, then, it is just that they haven't found Earth as yet. After all, the Universe is huge.

That isn't likely, either. The Galaxy is 15 billion years old, and the oldest technological civilization could be 10 billion years old. In 10 billion years, such a civilization would have had ample time to study every Sun-like star in the Galaxy. The likelihood of their missing even one is not worth considering.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It could be, then, that the extraterrestrial intelligences are humane beings that do not war on each other and that value life. They may know of our existence and are deliberately refraining from interfering with us in order that we may develop freely and, in due time, join a Galactic Federation.

This, to me, is the most attractive possible answer to the problem of non-visits, and, for that very reason, it may be only wishful thinking.

One last point, however. Perhaps this whole argument is pointless because representatives of extraterrestrial civilizations *have* visited us in the past as von Daniken claims, and are continuing to visit us in the present as the flying saucer enthusiasts insist.

I don't say this is inconceivable, but the silly bits of "evidence" presented by the credulous visitors-from-outer-space freaks are, so far at least, totally unworthy of consideration.

My own feeling, as I look over the list of possibilities, is that the most likely answer is the unbeatable existence of a speed-of-light limit. I suspect that the Galaxy is full of advanced, but isolated, civilizations.*

But can we at least establish some sort of contact?

If visiting is out of the question, and if regular and intimate exchanges of information are not in the cards, surely occasional contacts may be possible. It might be just something to let them know we're here; or just something to find out they're there. No more than that, perhaps. Just "Hello" in either direction.

Why?

We might want to bring ourselves to their attention just as a matter of pride. You, as an individual, might want the world to know that you exist, so we, as a species, might well want the Galaxy to know that we exist.

We can do this by sending out a material message. In fact, we have already done so. On March 3, 1972, *Pioneer 10* was launched. Its primary purpose was to pass near Jupiter and study it — which it did, most successfully, in December 1973. It picked up energy as it rounded Jupiter, and then passed on through the outer regions of the Solar system. By 1984 it will coast past Pluto's orbit and into the vastness of interstellar space.

Attached to it is a gold-anodized aluminum plate, 6 by 9 inches, which carries a representation of two human beings and information that, if de-

**There is a way in which the civilizations can observe the speed-of-light limit and yet not be truly isolated — at least in my opinion — but I'll save that for another article someday.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ciphered, will indicate the planetary system from which it originated and the time at which it originated. In 1973 a duplicate plaque was sent out when *Pioneer 11* was launched, and in 1977, recordings of a vast mix of Earth-sounds were sent out.

These are not particularly effective means of communication. It would take *Pioneer 10,* for instance, about 80,000 years to reach Alpha Centauri, if it were aimed in that direction, but it isn't. *Pioneer 10* will not, in fact, come close to any star we can see, close enough to enter its planetary system, for at least 10 billion years. The chances are thus enormously against anyone ever coming across those messages during the lifetime of humanity.

But why send material objects, when we can send radiation? We can send a beam of laser light or of microwaves, and aim them directly at stars in whose planetary systems we believe that advanced civilizations may exist. It would take such radiation only 4.4 years to reach Alpha Centauri, not 80,000 years, and it would also involve a good deal less trouble and expense.

However, why send out a beam blindly?

Why not first listen before trying to shout. Other civilizations, more advanced than we, could send out more effective signals than we could. Why not, then, try to detect the existence and exact site of a specific extraterrestrial intelligence and *then* beam a message to that site.

Will it do us any good to detect some extraterrestrial intelligence?

I think so. Let me give you one example of the good it might do. The mere fact that one exists, especially if what we detect can tell us that it is farther advanced technologically than we are, will prove to us that it is possible for a species to develop an advanced civilization and yet not commit suicide. I, for one, would be delighted to learn that.

But then, suppose we don't succeed. Does that mean that all advanced technologies *do* commit suicide?

Not necessarily. It might mean that we simply haven't developed detecting systems delicate enough, or that we aren't listening at the right "key-hole," or that we are receiving the evidence but aren't intelligent enough or advanced enough to grasp the fact that they are communicating something.

It could be, then, that even though we build enormously complex and enormously expensive devices to detect signals from extraterrestrial intelligences, we may not succeed. It is even, on the whole, much more likely that we won't succeed than that we will.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The businessman I mentioned in my introduction might shake his head at this. How can you begin such a task unless you are sure, in advance, that you will succeed?

The answer to that is that, in one way, we can't fail. Even if we detect no signals of extraterrestrial life, the complex detecting systems we build will surely extract so much other information from the sky generally as to vastly increase our understanding of the Universe we live in — and that can only be good.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS ON THE MOVE

If you are planning a change of address please notify us as far in advance as possible, and allow six weeks for the change to become effective.

Be sure to give us both your old and new address, including the zip codes. Print clearly and, if possible, attach an old mailing label.

OLD ADDRESS
(attach label here if available)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ ZIP _____
(please print)

NEW ADDRESS

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE,
Mercury Press, Inc., PO Box 56, Cornwall, Ct. 06753

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bruce McAllister has written nothing but superior stories for F&SF over the past ten years (most recently "Victor," July 1977), and we are pleased to offer this ironic and perfectly composed tale about the day the aliens came to Orange County.

Missionary Work

by BRUCE MC ALLISTER

I should have thrown the magazine away that day and I didn't.

I was upset. My heterotriad of six months was breaking up, and I was suffering a juvenile "step-one severance-guilt." I didn't really care about Belinda, but I'd had too many satisfying transMensa exchanges with George to let the relationship die without a psychocrisis.

Upset, I paid no attention to the piece of religious literature in my mail that day. Like all of us, I get enough of it every week. I brought it in, with a dozen other junk items and two inflated utility bills, and let the screendoor slam behind me. (P. Doan, the overpaid ex-Krishna gas-pumper in the adjacent apartment would wince, I hoped.) Then I threw all the items on the Levitz sofa, where they're going to lie for a few days.

I live in a stucco quadruplex in Costa Mesa, the city known as "the poor man's Newport." (Proof: Business licenses in CM are $150; in adjacent Newport, $550. Proof: No Spanish explorer or padre named the city; Costa Mesa was the winning entry in a 1924 name-your-city contest.) But the four of us do get more respect than most apartment dwellers in Orange County. We each have a galvanized garbage can assigned to us in the alley.

Two days later, Sorenson stopped me in the alley. Sorenson is another unit neighbor. He works for The Voice, a small ad agency, and is currently into OldEst — among other things. And he's obese.

As he struggled out of his powder-blue Mercedes 400 SLO "Lieben," I let my new Chevy "Butterfly" idle. It stalled. The damn budget shop had forgotten to reset it. When Sorenson reached my car window (his powder-blue jean coordinates spotless, as usual), he said, "None of my business, Ben. But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—" He smiled and frowned and then finished: "— I thought I should let you know there was an alien looking through your trash yesterday."

"What?" I said.

"One of the missionaries," he said, and the explanation annoyed me. The only aliens we ever saw were missionaries. "Did you," he said, "get some religious garbage in your mail last day or two?"

The carbon dioxide was blowing back from my exhaust, and Sorenson coughed twice. I remembered the mail on my sofa.

"Yeah," I said.

"Did you throw it away?"

"No," I said, feeling nauseous. I'd been trying to take only shallow breaths, but the exhaust was getting to me.

"That's too bad. They'll be hitting you soon."

I didn't understand. I didn't really know how the aliens worked, just that they were around and that they were thick in Southern California — with SoCal's religious conversion rate the highest in the nation for a decade.

My ignorance must have shown through my "maturity persona," because Sorenson said:

"The way I hear it, if you throw it away they leave you alone. If —"

"If you keep it," I interrupted, "they think you're a mark and they knock on your door, right?"

He didn't like being pre-empted. His "yeah" was slow and resentful.

Sorenson is a jerk, but I was glad for the warning. I certainly wasn't going to be around when the aliens knocked.

I thanked him, proceeded to the freeway, and at ten over the limit sailed on to NCR HQ in Anaheim (two blocks from the original Magic Kingdom), where I picked up the new sample logoed-forms that half of my day's scheduled prospects had asked to see.

I'm a business-forms salesman for National Cash Register, and Orange County is the new Los Angeles for local and national businesses in SoCal, and I've won the President's Sales Award two years running. In other words, OC is a gold mine for top salesmen, and I'm one of them.

When I got back that evening, I grabbed the religious garbage from the new Argyle sofa and walked it to the trash can in the alley. According to Sorenson, I was too late, but why take a chance?

It looked like any other large-format pulp-paper religious magazine. (At least my own group — the Church of New Religious Methods — doesn't go in for such classless media. We use glossy, treated paper, good cover stock, and when we can afford it, we take out news-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paper and tube ads.) The cover read HOPE SPRINGETH FROM THE STARS, and it showed a many-pointed star. At the end of each point there were words printed in a ridiculously flowery script. I looked at some of the words — "freedom," "astral immortality," "our father's and mother's love," "the cricket's song," "sorority" — and then gave up. The alley was too dim for more. The last thing I noted was the cover's horrible color scheme — as gaudy as an old-fashioned Hawaiian shirt. No sense of color coordination. Contrasting colors at their brightest. And the printing job was so bad that the colors fell outside the lines.

I'd expected better from the aliens. But when I thought about it I realized that I wasn't alone, that a lot of other people had been disappointed too, and that this was probably why the aliens didn't get much media attention anymore.

The more I thought about this idea, the more I liked it.

I simply forgot about the aliens. I had other things on my mind. Belinda — who's really just a moneygroupie who wants to be loved by more than one "baconhauler" at a time — called me Friday night and tried to explain (through a screen of "defense playtears") how it wasn't her fault, how *she* didn't want our triad to die, how George was really the one who wanted it dead, because (so he'd told her) he was sick and tired of her cutesy-pie babytalk voice.

The tears annoyed the hell out of me. I said, "If he said that, it *is* your fault, Belinda. Face it."

She really started crying then, and I knew nothing would get settled on the phone. I told her to come over the next morning to talk it out. Maybe (I said) we could hold hands and "self-center" for an hour or so. This stopped the crying.

She appeared at my door at 9 a.m. in a double-knit femsuit with big hibiscuses on it. She had readied her tears, and they were just starting to bulge from her eyes when I opened the door.

She had also brought her tape recorder — to help with the self-centering, I knew.

We were sitting on the rug, holding hands and listening to a tape of Belinda's breathing, when the doorbell rang.

I got up stiffly, took a step, stopped, and stared at the door. I'd just remembered the magazine. I knew who was at the door.

"What's the matter, Benji?" Belinda said — the first three words in babytalk, the fourth in an adult voice. Slowly she got up and swayed a little.

"Nothing." It wouldn't take long to get rid of them, I thought.

I was wrong.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When I opened the door, I found the missionaries — the inevitable two of them — almost pressing their faces against the screen door. They were ridiculous-looking. They were wearing men's suits — old, ancient-cut items from the Salvation Army or Newport Assistance League. Their bodies just weren't built for suits. The neckless shoulders were too wide, and the tight jackets could only be buttoned once. Their waists were too narrow, and the belts gathered the pants around them in pleats. Their legs were too short, and when they'd taken up the pants, they'd left four or five inches of cuffs.

I stared at their faces. They reminded me of the dolphins at DisneySea. Even through the dirty screen I could tell their complexions were smooth — an even, perfect gray. And their eyes — no eyebrows, no cheekbones on the neckless heads. The almond-shaped eyes — set too far apart to be aesthetically pleasing — were flush against the skin, and watery, and whenever they blinked they blinked twice quickly. The mouths were too high on the faces — up where the nostrils should have been — and they were long lipless cuts that went across most of the face, turning down at the edges as if sad. There was only one nostril — like a gill slit on a shark at DisneySea — and it barely fitted into the space between the eyes and mouth. It was curved like a smile, the gray flesh fluttering with every inhalation and exhalation. The faces were designed so stupidly, I saw. There was so much unused gray — and the eyes, nose and mouth were all smashed in together.

They were wearing hats, too — the kind worn by heroes and heavies in late-night tube movies. Where had they gotten them? No Assistance League would have them. I wondered what was under the silly hats — what they had to hide.

"Yes?" I said, following exactly the same script I would have used with a human salesman or missionary.

One of the two aliens began to make choking sounds, but the other didn't seem concerned. Both were looking at me. I was waiting for one of them to say something.

The choking sounds went on. Annoyed, I frowned at the alien.

And then somehow I started to recognize words in the choking sounds.

That was how they communicated? How could they expect a high conversion rate with such shoddy communications?

"You're going to have to start again," I said sternly. Did they know what a stern tone was? (There are certainly enough door-to-door humans who don't.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The alien making the choking sounds stopped. It closed its eyes, pressed its face against the screen, and began again. The chokes, wheezes, and spits sounds were indeed words, and I found I could understand them.

"You didn't," it said, "jettison our —" The last word was garbled.

"What?" I said sternly.

"Jettison our magazine," it said.

I started to interrupt, to remark sarcastically that I certainly had *meant* to — but I did not. Like everyone else who has an alien knocking on his door, I was curious. I wasn't going to let them in, but I was damn curious.

"We would like to share our faith with you," the talky alien said, its lips moving with difficulty against the dirty screen.

"I already have a faith — one at least," I said flatly.

"We understand that," it said, "and we are certainly not asking you to break from your faith into sin." It was speaking fluently now. "What we have to offer is what you might call an eternity-back guarantee. It will make your present faith even stronger."

I had already heard about their "eclecticism." So far, nothing in this conversation was new, and I was getting bored. I'd have liked seeing one of them try to run (could they do it — with those short legs?). I'd have liked seeing two of them (the right two sexes, of course) lie down on our St. Augustine lawn out in front and copulate. Action of *any* kind would have helped.

Belinda was standing behind me, too close. I could feel her breathing (her breath always smelled like hamburger — which was a little annoying, since she was an alleged vegetarian). I glanced around and caught her staring at them, her mouth open a little.

"I suppose," I whispered to her, "that you'd have me invite them in." My sarcasm was heavy, but I knew it would have little effect on her. She was bovine. I could see why George had tired of her, and I was suddenly embarrassed that I hadn't sooner.

The choking sounds had resumed, and I forced myself to listen.

"We ask for just five minutes. If we do not deliver our five-minute presentation to you; we have failed — we have failed in our ecumenical duties, and have sinned accordingly."

Neat psychosales technique. I started to say so —

"Oh, Benji, please let them in," Belinda said, excited. "I want to tape them!"

I deliberated and finally said, "All right." To the aliens I lied: "We're leaving for San Diego in forty minutes, so keep it to five

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

minutes, no more." I glared meaningfully.

I opened the door and stepped back, and the two came through with their eyes on the floor either in humility or caution. One carried a purse — yes, a woman's purse, Salvation vintage again. Belinda was almost bouncing with excitement, her big breasts giving the immense hibiscuses a life of their own. As the two aliens sat down stiffly on the new sofa, Belinda kneeled and began to set up the tape recorder on the rug near the sofa. I sat in one of the rattan chairs.

"What is that?" the talky alien said.

Without looking up, Belinda said, "A tape recorder. You've never seen one before?"

The alien was silent for a moment and finally said, "No. Is it important to your faith?"

"Yes," I said quickly, and Belinda giggled.

"Oh, yes," she said, enjoying herself. "We record everything we do and play it back to ourselves when we sleep. If we don't do this, it's a sin, and we go to hell."

"That's a beautiful concept," the alien said, blinking, the lipless slit opening and closing.

Abruptly the talky alien got up from the sofa, hunched over, took two steps toward Belinda (who struggled not to flinch, I noticed), and began to dance slowly around her and the machine, hopping from one foot to another, and chanting with wheezes of air. I had seen a dance like that before — on the tube — but I couldn't remember if it was African or Apache.

I couldn't understand the words (if they were words) of the chant, but when the alien stopped dancing, he faced the machine, crossed himself like a good Catholic, and made four sounds that were much clearer. They sounded a little like the English words "patter at matter soon," but I didn't recognize the language.

Suddenly I wasn't bored. We might even have some fun. After all, we could get the aliens to believe *anything*, and whatever we told them might appear in their "eclectic" religion months later — like a chain letter.

The talky alien reached for the old purse, removed a folded square of paper, and began unfolding it. It was an immense copy of the star on their magazine cover. He unfolded it and unfolded it, until the paper was big enough to touch the floor.

Without a word of introduction, the alien began:

"In the beginning, the Mother of the Universe — that is, Psyche, the androgynous daughter of the Eternal Yin and Yang, gave immaculate birth to the great Jehovah, unstable godhead of manic-depressive tendencies, whose manic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

persona was Allah. From this schizophrenia — that is, the split of right hemisphere from left, of dark *anima* from light *animus*, of the mystical feminine from the empirical masculine, the technological West from the transcendental East — we received Mohammed's admonition of directional —" The last word was garbled. It sounded something like "patinalization" — which makes no sense at all. Loudly the alien added: "Let us kneel, kneecap or not, toward the East."

Both aliens slipped from the couch and knelt. They were facing West, I saw, but said nothing. So far, their spiel had been pure bull. Masculine and feminine! How sincere could they be? The aliens had *three* sexes, not two. Were they mocking us?

The alien went on:

"The daughter of Allah — stolid elephant goddess Ganesha — in turn bore Jehovah a son, the transexual fishmonger Jesus, god and goddess of fishermen. In his ire —"

"Wait a minute," Belinda said suddenly. "This shitty machine ...." She fiddled with it for a moment and finally waved a go-ahead, but the alien remained silent. Impatient, Belinda frowned and said, "Okay, okay! Let's go."

Slowly the alien resumed: "In his ire — at Allah's trickery — Jehovah placed upon his own son a curse — that his son travel to every inhabitable planet of the universe, that he perform miracles on each, that he give rise to legends and myths, and that he pass on before receiving any just rewards for his deeds. All of this, for eternity, world without end, amen."

The alien stopped, and at first his silence seemed pointless. Then I noticed that he was staring at his silent companion. The companion seemed to be drooping, slouching. Belinda was noticing it too.

"Doesn't your friend talk?" she said.

The talky alien said, "Usually, yes."

Abruptly the alien resumed: "God's love is within us. We are reborn by baptism and sudden faith from —" another garbled word — "or existential despair of the finite into otherness and umbilical freedom. The miracle which any Christian or other Saltatian faith requires can be as simple as a single *example* of that faith. Is this clear?"

We both nodded. The last thing we were going to do was ask for clarification.

"We see God's love, as well, in Kirlean photography and in Velikovsky's confusion. We see Jehovah's rage as Mephistopheles temporarily caged in the Bermuda Triangle, his voice the drone of reptile or amphibian from a Scottish

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loch — in agony from too many disbelievers."

I was truly bored. And I was annoyed with Belinda for extending the boring event with her damned tape recorder.

"A sasquatch is not alive unless he knows it. He —"

I interrupted, saying, "I'm sorry, but that's going to have to be it. I trust this satisfies your mission's obligations."

After a moment the alien said, "Yes." I expected it to add "May we return?" or "What comes next in our presentation is even better — how about next Saturday?" but he said nothing.

The drooping, slouching companion seemed a little wobbly-legged when they rose, but with the other's help he managed to get out the door.

Belinda and I laughed for a while, listening to fragments of the tape, playing them at different speeds. Then I "distanced" from her (a little compulsively, I admit) by lying about some NCR homework I had, and she accepted the lie easily.

When she was gone, I went and read some *Primal Breathing*, the freebie copy I'd gotten with my *Popular Theology* membership. Then I did some bubble meditation in the bathtub. Then I called Barbara and went to The Iris for drinks and two dreary hours of an exorcistic bellydancing act — straight from Venice, CA.

I soon forgot about the aliens. And I shouldn't have.

At first, ten years ago, the aliens had been big news. All the media of all the nations of the world had joined forces to cover this greatest of historical events — which was easily worth two dozen assassinations, ten major regional wars, or five discoveries of trivial life on other planets.

At first it was just one alien ship (a small one at that) with five aliens in it (all missionaries), and if they'd kept to their original idea — to the religion they'd arrived with — they'd have done fine. But, no, they had to "adapt."

At the start, thousands of scholars, scientists and men of the cloth had been fascinated with the aliens' faith — "The Faith of All Links" — the faith of fourteen billion porpoise-headed aliens inspired together on three distant worlds. Granted, we humans couldn't relate to the "conformisticism" of the aliens' religious practice, nor could we exactly understand the tenets of their faith. (We never did get a clear vision of what their religion's god or gods or gestalt or "universal plane" really looked like, what their churches or temples or shrines looked like, or how their religion ran itself fiscally — that is, the es-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sentials of their religion.) But at least their religion was *alien*, and this kept people interested.

Then their religion changed. Stupidly, the aliens "adapted."

First, their religion swallowed a faith that looked strangely like Fundamentalist Northwest Baptist.

Then their religion absorbed a faith that was the spitting image of Hanafi-Black Muslimism Reconciled.

Then Chasidic Judaism.

Then a supertheological form of Von Danikenism.

Then Dianetics. Then Janaism. Then Transcendental Transactionalism (with "regression stress").

Before long, we humans lost interest. It took about six months. The alien religion was no longer alien. It was a mirror and it was boring.

More alien ships arrived, orbited our planet, and after customs inspections were finally permitted to land. Most of the ships landed in the endless federal land in SoCal. The aliens let the government inspect their ships for "technological insight," and the government soon announced that ships were really pretty simple — if you could manufacture enough electromagnetic "donuts" for a sequence of "black hole effects" for each little ship. The government got to work on the "donuts," but soon was as bored with the aliens as civilians were.

Soon the aliens had a corpse to give us — the body of an alien struck down by a vehicle on an army base near San Bernardino. The doctors and scientists at Harvard Medical and the Pentagon had fun with it for a while, until they'd answered all their questions, and then they grew bored. (The most interesting anatomical discovery of all was really pretty disgusting. Apparently every alien body is inhabited by a worm that cleans out the dead tissues that otherwise would amass as "cancers" in the alien's organs. This is called a "symbiotic relationship," and our doctors have studied it fully.)

Some alien ships landed in the Soviet Union, too, of course, and before long there was an alien corpse for the Soviets also. And soon the Soviets were bored. The ship and the corpse were easy enough to understand, and that was all the aliens really had to offer — except their religion, which didn't even stay *their* religion.

When the aliens asked if they could perform their missionary obligations among us, our government said "Why not." The aliens had given us their ships and a body, and if we were nice to them, maybe they would show us more of their technology later. (You know how the government thinks.) But our government did make it clear that if any alien was caught in a politically

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

suspicious act (anything sexual through strategic), all aliens would immediately be interned in special camps.

The aliens agreed to all stipulations and began their missionary work. In addition, they promised to do their best to adapt to our culture. Their first step (they said) should be clothing.

Their taste in clothing reveals, I think, how unsophisticated they are — spaceship technology or not. And it reveals how little they really understand us (and understanding *is* sophistication). Also, their species is fifteen times older than mankind, and so they should be further along technologically than they are. Technology always evolves if a species waits long enough, and it evolves early if the species is smart enough.

I thought it was over — with the aliens. I assumed I'd never see them again.

On Tuesday at lunch I phoned George at his work. I told him we could dig up another fem easily enough for a heterotriad, but he said no, that the relationship was dying naturally, that tampering with its natural death would be perverted. I panicked. I began pleading with him. I said it had been my fault, that I'd stupidly brought the bovine Belinda into our relationship and that he should give me a chance to redeem myself. Such talk, he responded, embarrassed him. My whining, heavy-handed "dependency insistence" (Michael Ruark, *Your Life as Mine*, Doubleday, 1979) was pathetic, he pointed out. Instantly I apologized (the worst thing I could have done) and began again, but he saw it coming and said I was stupid to try to communicate such things over the phone, where most "sensory corpomedia" (Jimmy A. Smith, *The New Corpolinguistics*, NAL/Fast Books, 1982) were lacking. I pleaded for a Saturday morning tete-a-tete. To get me off the phone he said okay.

It was Saturday noon, and George and I were about to go out for a "Wholearth Burger" and "Natural Fries" at the local Carl's Junior. I was showing him photographs of the three fems whose bodies I'd gotten to know at the Redone Christian Rolfing Camp the previous summer. No, I wasn't a Redone Christer, but I'd been into rolfing (and feather therapy, which I'd learned about from a rock-ranch groupie — along with a penicillin-resistant social bug). So, like a Redone, I'd forked over my $1,000 and joined the camp. Photographs were essential, according to our mentor, and she'd had us study photographs of one another *au naturel* for "translibidinal incorporation" at the interpersonal rolfing springboard every morning.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We were sitting on the floor, with the 8-by-10 glossies spread out in front of us, when the doorbell rang.

Somehow instantly I knew who it was. I felt like a fool. How could I have dismissed them so easily?

"Who is it, Ben?" George said. "You seem to know. That's a pretty snail-like response."

Reluctantly I said, "Two aliens caught me last weekend." I paused painfully and added, "I know this will sound silly, but why don't we hide in the bedroom or at least sit here quietly until they go away."

He looked at me disdainfully. "Maybe," he said loudly, "it *wasn't* just Belinda." He could be so cruel. "Your reactions to reality leave something to be desired. Go answer the door, Ben."

I was unhappy, but I went and opened the door. I didn't look at the figures on the other side of the screen, but opened the door for them.

The aliens stepped in. I looked up and saw that one of the aliens (the talky one? the droopy one?) had a runny eye. He was sick.

They sat on the couch, and George and I reclined in the new Jap chrome-and-reed chairs I'd gotten on sale Monday. George was staring at the aliens with his perfect "self-comport," and I was in awe. How did he maintain so perfectly?

"Yes?" George said. Clearly he was going to play host — and choreographer.

The aliens stared back at him, and George saw the runny eye, too.

"Your eye is running," he said to the one with the runny eye.

"Yes," the other said. "He is sick."

"What?" George said. The alien's speech — the choking and wheezing — was new to him. George turned to me and said, "Is he trying to talk?"

I nodded.

"Yes," the alien repeated. "He is sick."

George understood the choking this time, and grimaced. George was quick. He certainly was on top of the choking more quickly than I had been.

George was rising from his chair. "That is totally —"

The talky alien interrupted him, saying flatly, "No, it is not contagious. You have not only our assurance of this, but as well the word of your CD Control Center in Atlanta, Georgia. It is our disease alone, rest assured."

Reluctantly George sat down.

"I hope," George said, "you realize how silly you look in those clothes."

I tensed at George's bluntness. (It is a "demiautistic flaw" in me, I know; I so fear violence that I see its potential in almost any situation.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes," the alien said softly. "But we imagined that a familiar silliness would be preferable to an alien dignity."

This annoyed George at first, but then I suspect he found himself admiring the brief flash of intelligence from the alien. He responded with his best Hollywood smile, his head tipped back a little, mouth open a little, nodding once and slow.

"I can see your point," he said.

"Well," the alien said, and the word sounded so human. "The last time we visited this abode we presented our overview of creation and cosmology. But faith is not shallow, and we must now plunge in and embrace the texture of the faith's homeostatic depths, for only through acceptance of a Summerhillian embrace can we assure that the weak among us shall inherit the fertile soil of our incarnate polarities."

George was frowning but said nothing.

The talky alien unfolded the star and displayed it again. With one strangely curved gray finger, he pointed to one of the star's points and said:

"As you will recall from last week —"

"I wasn't," George interrupted, "here last week."

The alien stopped and stared at him. "I am so sorry."

"As you should be." George let the sarcasm drip. "Insensitivity to the individual identities of prospective converts is stupid — not to mention rude — and certainly no way to run a religion. You should know better. Weren't you all screened by the administrators of your religion?"

"You are right," the alien said. "I am sure you are right. It is a lack we inherit — an original flaw of sin. You see, on our worlds we are much less aware of differences between one individual and another."

"That is unfortunate."

"Apparently." Again the alien said "Well" in a very human tone, and resumed: "As we were saying at your absence ... a sasquatch who is believed in by at least one soul hears a clapping that permits him spiritual life. This clapping is not unlike the Universal Cricket's Song, caged or uncaged in the East, and delivered homophonically or polyphonically. This is what Urantia says; this is what Jung and Mao say; this is what Chardin and Hubbard all say. If your soul's nose can sniff out the image of a saffron-robed big-footed yeti rubbing his legs together in a cricket's song, the Ohm will sound forever for you. Is this clear?"

I nodded. George started to, but the alien said, "It should not be. Were it clear, it would be finite, and this it should not be."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

George frowned. Suddenly he glanced at me and winked confidentially. What was he up to?

The alien was saying, "But this tells you only what form your prayer might take. And prayer is but the connection, the bridge, the dentures of the tortoise, the pagoda on its back, the snake below swallowing itself forever...."

The alien with the runny eye had started to lean against his talky companion who didn't stop.

"There are buttons — not the push kind, but the clasp kind," the alien said. "Buttons to hold our layers of consciousness closed. You must find these. You must unbutton them and confront yourself. You must do this until you are no longer your Self, but One of the Many. Individuation leads to loneliness, to an urge to escape from freedom. The freedom to unbutton is —"

Abruptly George said, "I beg your pardon."

The alien stopped, stared, and repeated:

"The freedom to unbutton is —"

George was on his feet now. "Do you dare repeat that," he was saying, "to my face?"

The alien did not understand the word "dare." He looked blankly at George and obligingly repeated, "The freedom to unbutton is —"

George took two steps, leaned over, and slapped the alien's face.

The gray head wobbled and the mouth opened and closed. The eyes did not blink. They stared.

The alien rose slowly as if to leave, then stood for a moment, and sat back down. The drooping companion with the runny eye hadn't moved an inch.

"Why?" the alien whispered.

"You offended my religious faith," George explained. "You cannot go around insulting us. As a species you are quite presumptuous, it appears."

"We are presumptuous," the alien repeated. "We should leave?"

"Yes, I think you'd better," George said. "And you should stay away until you have given it some thought. It was difficult for me to strike you, but it was for your own good. Otherwise you will fail to learn. And you cannot afford that."

"Maybe you are right," the alien said. He reached for the arm of the sick companion, and they rose.

When they were gone, I started laughing. "That didn't offend our faith. You didn't even understand it."

"That gibberish? Of course not." George smiled his special smile (I've always wished I could imitate it, but I can't — one either does it naturally, or not at all). "I was bored, as you were, and they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were rude. They needed a lesson. Like children."

I knew the aliens would stay away now.

Saturday morning I was sleeping in — after a late night of divine peyote mantras at the Center — when the doorbell rang. Groggy, I couldn't imagine who it was. (I was of course hoping it was George — but I knew he just didn't believe in forcing a relationship.)

My eyes were sticky from sleep, and I was wearing my Lacoste terry-cloth jumpjamas (gift from Helen). I opened the door a crack and looked out.

"The other one is not here," the familiar gray face said. "We *know* he is not. Therefore we cannot offend him. May we come in?"

I woke up instantly. Shocked awake, I said to myself: They have made a fool of you three times now. This must stop! I was enraged. I wanted to scream at them through the screen. I started to, but remembered P. Doan next door. He'd love a commotion, and I'd never live it down. I decided to let them in — and perform as George would have: I would let them, as though giving in; and, once in, I would let them have it — in a voice George would use — scathing, merciless, patronizing, and condescending.

I opened the screen door and nodded once, my jaw clenched.

As the aliens entered, I saw how badly the one was doing. Both eyes were running now, and the eyeballs were pink. His companion had a firm hold on his arm.

I was shocked and distracted by the illness.

"This is stupid and cruel," I said, stopping them in the middle of the room. "He should be receiving medical attention! No humane religion asks for self-destruction!"

"There is nothing to be done," the talky alien said, blinking rapidly. "There is no treatment."

I thought I understood what he meant. Leukemia — or some other cancer.

"How do you expect to impress us — to convert us — when you always appear so incompetent," I said, hoping this sounded like one of George's monologues.

When the alien's words came, they sounded different. There was an intensity to them that surprised me, perhaps even scared me.

"*That,*" the alien said, "is the one thing we do not understand. Your need for slick, graceful outward signs of an internal grace. Veneers are insignificant in the face of profound faith."

The alien's monologue had been fast, fluent, and intense, and had left him with an opaque saliva running from his mouth.

I hesitated, thinking hard. Finally I said, "If the external and in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ternal lives are not one, unified, we are not a whole ...."

I did not know what I meant exactly, but it sounded like something George would say. I needed badly a decent line.

The alien seemed not to hear me. He was whispering, "I have met two specimens of what you call 'Amerindians' and I have found them much less demanding of what you call 'polish.' But they are old organisms, and they are as different from you and yours as we are."

I was not maintaining an upper hand, I saw, and began to panic. I didn't want to slap the alien, but it was the only "image of solution" (Barnard, NBC "Psychoseries #1," February, 1978) that came to mind.

"If you don't understand us," I said, "why do you dress up like fools and try to convert us?"

As I said it, I realized how weak it was. Forced and weak. It was a question, and it was too long.

The alien looked at me then with a new expression.

"It is not *our* message," he said. "It is *your* messages — your faiths — all together. We cannot understand how as a species you manage to believe such disparate things. We have tried to help you integrate. Your faiths cannot really be disparate. It is your *images* that are disparate. This must be frustrating and lonely to you all."

Of course I didn't understand this babble. Faith? Image? As George had said, these aliens were so presumptuous — to try to tell us about *us*.

"You presume!" I said loudly, but the semi-shout was insincere — I didn't know what I was shouting about. I just felt concerned.

"We are not you," I added. "You are not us. You 'project'!"

At first I assumed the alien hadn't understood. Then his expression changed, and he appeared excited, and he said, "Yes! Yes! We 'project'! Apparently *you* understand — when none of the others do." He sounded relieved, and he was nodding vehemently at me.

I didn't understand it at all. I had accused him of "ego-stricture" (Cohen vs. Simpson in the 1977 *Popular Psychology* debates), and he was *happy* about it.

I started to say something, to question his definition of "project"—

And then suddenly the ill, drooping alien made a sound.

He leaned against his talky companion, and his companion turned to him. A sound like the squeals made by pigs passed between them. Then the healthy alien took the other's head in his hands and slowly pulled it toward his face. I stiffened, wondering what was happening.

The ill alien's eyes rolled as he slipped from his companion's hold.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The ill alien struck the floor loudly. I stood up horrified. How inept! Was the damn thing going to die in my living room? Would there be blood — their color of blood — on my rug? Would there be (God forbid!) a release of waste material — a defecation — as it died, as often with humans?

The dying alien writhed once on the floor, popping the jacket button, and then went stiff, head twisted, eyes open toward me.

The other alien was kneeling beside him.

I was staring at the unblinking face on the floor, and then I saw it begin to happen.

One of the sick alien's eyes bulged for a moment, and the slit between the eye and facial skin began to widen. I stopped breathing.

A small white fingertip-like thing appeared in the slit, squirming, struggling to free itself. As it squirmed, more of it appeared.

A worm. *The* worm. I stared open-mouthed.

The kneeling alien turned and looked up at me, mouth in a new expression.

"Will you?" he asked.

"What?" I stammered.

"Will you take his faith? It will die in this atmosphere within minutes. It is fleeing from the decomposing body."

I was standing now, and stepping back in horror.

"You all have worms?" I blurted out. I had known this fact only as an *idea.* This was different.

The alien did not answer. He stared at me for a moment; his mouth changed expression; and then he turned back to the body. He leaned over and slowly pressed his face against his companion's. The squirming pencil-thin worm disappeared between the two gray heads, and suddenly I knew what was happening. It was being accepted. Eye to eye.

It was horrible. I wanted to scream. I wanted George to be there — for a slap of reality.

The kneeling alien stiffened, then relaxed, and finally got up. Again he turned to me.

"I will return with the proper container for the body. Please don't summon anyone. I will have the body away from here within two hours. The body will not taint the premises in any way. Bear with me. Thank you very much."

When the alien was gone, I did not stay inside with the corpse. I went and stood in the afternoon So-Cal sun, on our thick St. Augustine lawn, and stared down the street. The alien had disappeared. Was there a ship that close?

A sound behind me made me turn. It was P. Doan, looking through his screen door.

"What's the problem?" he said,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loud and gruff as usual.

I walked slowly toward his door.

"The aliens are sure flocking to your door these days," he said, frowning.

I was annoyed — and embarrassed — and I found myself answering in pseudo cockiness.

"One less alien to flock to my door now." I said and even made it jaunty.

"What are you trying to tell me?" he said. "You killed one of them?"

Instantly I regretted having said it. I couldn't tell if he was joking or not, and my demiautism was giving me another chill. I knew that P. Doan would love to have his neighbor kill someone — alien or human — and have it become hyped media news. Doan was one of those who thrived on an "ambience of crisis" (Johnson and Johnson, *Our Nurturing Crises*, University of California Press, 1967).

"No," I said, too loudly. "It did it by itself — sick as a dog — dropped where it stood in the middle of the living room, in the middle of a silly prayer." A lie, yes, but it sounded good. Colorful. Rhythmic.

"You'd better call the police," he said.

I stiffened again. "Why?"

"Don't be stupid. They know what to do."

"And what's that?" I tried sarcasm.

"It's probably a UN matter. Diplomatic and World Health Organization matters."

What bullshit! What did he know? But I didn't have a decent repartee. And I turned to re-enter the apartment without answering him.

"You gonna call?" he said behind me.

Without answering, I let the screen door slam behind me. Without looking at the corpse, I went to my bedroom and read twenty more pages of *Primal Breathing*.

Twenty pages later, the police arrived.

P. Doan had phoned them, as I should have known he would. Now he would get credit for the entire event.

They took the body away quickly. Apparently there was some medical bigwig at the Huntington Hospital who'd been waiting three years to get his gloved paws on an alien body, and he had pull with the local police.

I was standing on the street, staring at the spot where the ambulance had rested only minutes before, when I spotted the alien. He was at the end of the street, and he was watching me. I knew he knew.

I went to him, and when I reached him, I said, "I wasn't the one who phoned. My neighbor did."

He said nothing. He was shak-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing. One of his eyes was bulging. I thought at first the shaking was from the death of his companion or the loss of the corpse. Then I sensed that it probably had something to do with the worm — the second worm that was now in him.

He took a step toward me and his face loomed. I did not step back. I held my ground. A lot was at stake here — perhaps the pride and respect of the human race, since I was its representative.

His face was so close now that it was out of focus, and coming closer.

Finally I stepped back.

The face came back into focus. "You do not," it said, "have the faiths, do you." It was an accusation. Was there a sadness behind it? Or was I imagining — "projecting?"

"You mean those white slugs?"

"Yes. Faiths are always white."

"The only thing we have that looks like that," I said, "is a maggot." I knew my next line would be a good one: "And a maggot enters a human body *after* death, not while it is alive."

"I see," the alien said. "They are our faiths, and we assumed stupidly that they were yours, too, and that your images were something else. The faiths unite us, and we assumed — wrongly, we assumed...."

"You're kidding," I said, amazed.

"Our unity through them is, yes, a neuroelectromagnetic fact."

I thought for a moment. "The slugs are telepathic?"

The alien was silent, trying to understand. "No. It is more complete. The small white faiths are aware of one another — one of them is in each of us, and so we are aware, and so we are one. There is *us* — fourteen billion. The small white faiths are our faith — the Faith of Links — and the links are real."

At last the alien stopped, exhausted. It was panting through its slit and still shaking.

I said nothing. I was suddenly tired. I needed bubble meditation, I knew — or some feather therapy from a fine fembody.

"It is a fine thing," the alien said flatly. "When the faiths are with you, you live a miracle every time-unit of every day. Do you understand?"

Again the alien began coming towards me, face blurring. This time I stepped back immediately, aware of what he wanted to do. I felt sick. Why did he keep trying? How could he expect me to do it?

"The cock crows three times," the alien said, adding a sound much like a human sigh. What he'd said was familiar, but I couldn't place it. His expression was also familiar, but I couldn't place it either.

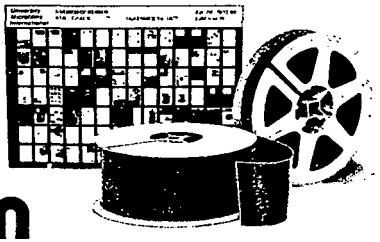
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The alien gave up then, turned, and left forever.

When I had a chance a few days later, I looked up the "cock" reference in a key-word index on popular religions. I found it, and I think I know what he was getting at. But I was raised a Unitarian in Sonoma, California, and so the New Testament doesn't have much effect on me. Maybe if I'd been a Fundamentalist or a Catholic or Redone Christer, it would have had more punch.

A few months later — without a word of warning or explanation — the aliens gathered themselves together and within 24 hours had left in their ships. They've been gone for four months now, and I could have sworn their religion was dead. But according to the media there's this charismatic leader who is working wonders with it and it's finally catching on. In the 60's this fellow was a Positive Satanist, and in the 70's, a leader in the big Egocentering Movement. Now he says he's seen the clear light, and he'll be giving his all to the "Message from the Stars," and that he will — so help him God! — give every last "image" in that religion its just emphasis. He had his first congregation last week — 6,000 in El Monte — and it does look like the movement will last at least a full year.

this publication is available in microform



Please send me additional information.

Name _____
Institution _____
Street _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____

University Microfilms International

300 North Zeeb Road
Dept. P.R.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106
U.S.A.

18 Bedford Row
Dept. P.R.
London, WC1R 4EJ
England

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You've got to be putting us on

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION
P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, Ct. 06753

Send me_____F&SF shirts at $5.00 each, enclosed.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State_____ Zip_____

Small ☐ Medium ☐ Large ☐ Extra Large ☐

Order size larger to allow for shrinkage.
Add $1.00 for Canadian and foreign postage.

F&SF T-shirts make a great gift and are available only from this magazine at the bargain price of $5.00 each, which includes postage and handling. These handsome cotton shirts come in navy blue with the original F&SF logo imprinted in white. All sizes in stock and shipped as soon as we receive the coupon or a separate order.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS RATES

THE MAGAZINE OF
Fantasy AND Science Fiction

$12.50 for the first one-year subscription (your own or gift)

$8.50 for each additional one-year subscription

Send Fantasy and Science Fiction as a Christmas gift:

(PLEASE PRINT)

To _____
Name of Recipient

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

To _____
Name of Recipient

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

11-78

☐ I enclose $ _____

☐ Bill me after Christmas

Enter my own subscription
☐ New
☐ Renewal

Foreign postage: Canada and Mexico $1.00 other countries $2.00 per year.

My name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Mercury Press, Inc.
P.O. Box 56
Cornwall, Ct. 06753

Gift cards will be sent to you, for you to personalize with your own signature.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantasy and Science Fiction

MARKET PLACE

BOOKS-MAGAZINES

SCIENTIFANTASY specialist: Books, magazines. Free catalog. Gerry de la Ree, 7 Cedarwood, Saddle River, N.J. 07458.

SF-FANTASY magazines, books, paperbacks. Lists free. Collections also purchased. Robert Madle, 4406 Bester Drive, Rockville, MD 20853.

FREE CATALOG! Science Fiction and mystery books. Save to 70%. Spencer Books, P.O. Box 186, So. Laguna, CA 92677.

PAPERBACKS out of print: Send wants. SASE, McCrae, 8120 Buttonwood, Citrus Heights, CA 95610.

FREE CATALOGUE of hardcover science fiction, fantasy books and pulps. Canford, Drawer 216, Freeville, NY 13068.

FOREIGN EDITIONS OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. Copies of French, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish editions available at $1.50 each, three for $4.00. Mercury Press, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753.

BACK ISSUE MAGAZINES. Over 200 titles. 1890 to 1978. Send stamped envelope. Free list. Everybody's Bookshop, Dept. FA, 317 West 6th, Los Angeles, Calif. 90014.

FIRST EDITIONS, book club editions, paperbacks. Next 4 FSF catalogues $1.00. Aardvarks FSF Books, Box 15070, Orlando, Fla. 32858.

FREE LISTS. Used paperbacks, 15 cents & up. Used hardbacks, $1.00 up. New paperbacks, discount prices, SF, Fantasy, Mysteries, L&J, Box 693, Bellevue, Nebraska 68005.

RARE FIRST EDITIONS of Science Fiction & Fantasy. *10% off on new hardcover S.F.&F. Catalogues issued*, want lists accepted. Barry R. Levin Science Fiction & Fantasy Literature (member A.B.A.A.) 2253 Westwood Blvd., L.A., CA 90064 (213) 474-5611.

SCIENTIFICTION - PULPS, PAPERBACKS. Catalog free. Collections also purchased. BMEC, Box 64-MF-12, Chambersburg, PA 17201.

MASTER AND USE THE AMAZING POWERS: Free catalog. The P-E-M Company, Box 2315FS, Naranja, FL 33032.

USED SCIENCE FICTION, Fantasy Books. Many O.P., scarce. List for stamp. R.K., P.O. Box 524, Kenmore Station, Boston, MA 02215.

96 Page F&SF Catalogue, "Fantasyarchives" 71 Eighth Ave., NY 10014. 929-5391. $3.00-deductible, first order. "We also Buy."

LARGE FREE CATALOG. Send wants. Marx, 4412 18th, Lubbock, TX 79416.

NEBULOUSFAN. 50¢/issue; $2/year. Cartoons, reviews, letters. NebulouSFan, 7209 DeVille, Ft. Worth, TX 76118.

GORDON DICKSON FANS: HOME FROM THE SHORE — first edition personally autographed by Dickson and collaborator-artist Jim Odbert: $6.50. Otterburn Associates, Dept. F3, Box 1896, St. Paul, MN 55111

COLLECTORS — Receive our listings of hundreds of good used and out-of-print SF hardcovers. $1.00 (Refundable with first order.) PMSF, 10357 Dearlove #1-G, Glenview, IL 60025.

NEW, USED AND OUT OF PRINT Books. Free catalog. Allan Sherman, 49 Fieldstone Road, Staten Island, NY 10314.

SUZY McKEE CHARNAS, URSULA LE GUIN in Winter ALGOL. Now quarterly! $2.25, year $8. The Book of Ellison: 200pp quality paperback $5.95, limited hardcover $15.00. ALGOL, Box 4175F, New York, NY 10017.

SCARCE and out-of-print fantasy and science fiction. Catalogues sent on application. Star Treader Books, 434 West Pender, Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

SF-FANTASY books, paperbacks, magazines. 3 lists/.25. Gordon Barber, 35-I Minneapolis Ave., Duluth, MN 55803.

WEIRD TALES, ASTOUNDINGS, AMAZINGS, Wonder, FN, FFM, FA, etc. Complete pulp catalog, two stamps or coin. Digests (50 or more) $1.00 each: Astounding 1950-78, FSF 1950-1978, Imagination, Galaxy's 1950-1960, IF, Other Worlds, Fantastic, Argôn Books, 290 Driving Pk, Rochester, NY 14613.

Do you have something to advertise to sf readers? Books, magazines, typewriters, telescopes, computers, space-drives, or misc. Use the F&SF Market Place at these low, low rates: $5.00 for minimum of ten (10) words, plus 50 cents for each additional word. Send copy and remittance to: Adv. Dept., Fantasy and Science Fiction, P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FANTASY CROSSROADS: features offutt, REH, Wellman, Kuttner, Fabian, Moorcock article, Tierney. Box 12428, Shawnee Mission, KS 66212, $3.

CLOTHING

F&SF T-SHIRTS. 100% cotton, navy blue with original magazine logo imprinted in white. Sm, med, large, extra-large. $5.00 each. Mercury Press, Box 56, Cornwall, CT 06753.

PERSONAL

DATES GALORE! Meet singles-anywhere. Call DATELINE, toll-free (800) 451-3245.

PYRAMIDS

THE MOST UNIQUE EXPERIMENTAL PYRAMID KIT IN THE WORLD. Can be assembled to 7 different sizes: from 22 in. to 7½ ft. base. $15. to $25. Precision "Cheops," beautifully handcrafted, guaranteed. Free brochure: (313) 573-3805 or Pyramid Energies, Box 461-X, Fraser, Mich. 48026.

RECORDS-TAPES

On February 11, 1969, a record was found on a New York City elevator. It purports to have been recorded some 100 to 150 years from now. 10 inch, 33-1/3 r.p.m. copies may be purchased for $3.00 from The Record, Box 3011, New York, NY 10008.

MISCELLANEOUS

ESP LABORATORY. This new research service group can help you. For FREE information write: Al G. Manning, ESP Laboratory, 7559 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90046.

JAPANESE Girls Make Wonderful Wives. We have large number of listings, many interested in marriage. Only $1.00 brings application, photos, names, description, etc. Japan International, Box 156-FSF, Carnelian Bay, CA 95711.

BEAUTIFUL Mexican - Oriental girls needing American Boy-Friends. Free Details, "actual" photos. World, Box 4876-FAN, San Diego, CA 92103.

POOL CUES, two section. Several designs and colors. Five dollars each. Money back guarantee. Send check, money order or cash to J. Hill, 1611 Grandon Drive, Apt. 16-B1, Killeen, TX 76549.

WRITING COURSE: Ready to teach beginning writers via personalized low cost correspondence course. For information write: CATSKILL RESIDENCY, P.O. Box 64, White Lake, NY 12786.

PAINTED FANTASY FIGURES, Tolkien, Rice Burroughs, and others for Wargames or display. Hundreds, sample & catalog $1.50, Fantastic Products — FSF, Box 5328, GCS, N.Y., NY 10017.

COLDS? PREVENT? STOP!! Research reports $3.00. W. Garvin, Box 1492, Garden Grove, CA 92640.

TIME TRAVEL — For a plan that could make it available to you, send 50c to TIME WARP, 1210 Truxillo, TX 76004.

INCENSE STICKS. 25 sticks each box. Send $1.00 to J. Hill, 1611 Grandon Dr., Apt. 16-B5, Killeen, TX 76549.

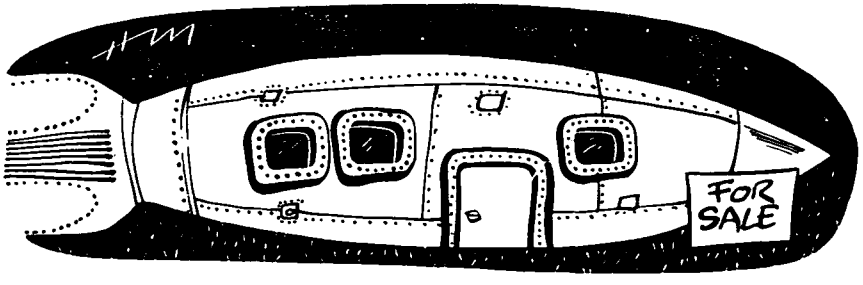
DISCOVER NEW, EASY, PROVEN way to prevent storms, floods, droughts. Free instructions. Results guaranteed. Nature Control. Box 2466, Clarksburg, WV 26301.

HANDWRITING ANALYSIS $5.00 & sample. Lynn, Box 39029, Chicago, IL 60639.

OTHER PERCEPTIONS — Seven quality "11x14" pen & ink prints by professional artist Gary Raham. $2.95 + .50 postage. Biostration, Box 399, Wellington, CO 80549.

PERSONAL MONTHLY HOROSCOPE. $3.00 & birth date. Lynn, Box 39029, Chicago, IL 60639.

RACISM - NOAH'S ARK (Spaceship) Psychic Revelations, Bi-sexual, spirits, book $5.00. Dickerson Distributors, 897 American, New Braunfels, TX 78130.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDEX TO VOL. 55, JULY-DECEMBER 1978

Asimov, Isaac: *Science*
Second To The Skua ..... July 127
Rings And Things ..... Aug. 131
Countdown ..... Sept. 121
Toward Zero ..... Oct. 131
Fifty Million Big Brothers ..... Nov. 85
Checklist of Science Essays ..... Nov. 79
Where Is Everybody? ..... Dec. 128
Barrett, Neal Jr.:
The Flying Stutzman ..... July 62
Benford, Gregory:
In Alien Flesh (novelet) ..... Sept. 6
Bishop, Michael: *Effigies (novelet)* .. Oct. 106
Brennan, Herbie: *Achilles Heel* ..... Aug. 54
Budrys, Algis: *Books* ..... July 54
Books ..... Sept. 30
Books ..... Oct. 34
Books ..... Nov. 13
Carr, Terry: *Virra* ..... Oct. 141
Cherryh, C.J.: *Cassandra* ..... Oct. 41
Collins, Reid: *The Book Keeper* .... Sept. 57
Competition ..... Sept. 158
Cook, Glen: *Quiet Sea (novelet)* .... Dec. 7
Davidson, Avram:
A Good Night's Sleep (novelet) ... Aug. 88
De Camp, L. Sprague:
The Yellow Man ..... Dec. 31
Dellinger, Paul:
The Werewolf Of West Point ..... July 84
De Vet, Charles V.:
Second Chance ..... Nov. 67
Disch, Thomas M.: *The Man*
Who Had No Idea (novelet) ..... Oct. 5
Concepts (novelet) ..... Dec. 89
Eisenberg, Larry: *The Interface* .... Aug. 72
Garnett, David S.:
Warlord Of Earth ..... July 117
Goulart, Ron: *Pulling The Plug* ..... Oct. 94
Grant, Charles L.:
Caesar, Now Be Still ..... Sept. 40
Green, Joseph: *The Wind*
Among The Mindymuns ..... Dec. 50
Hoshi, Shinichi:
He--y, Come On Ou--t! ..... Nov. 75
Jennings, Gary:
Be Jubilant My Feet! ..... Dec. 66
Keen, Rod: *It's The*
Queen Of Darkness, Pal ..... Aug. 36
Kelly, James Patrick:
Death Therapy ..... July 137
King, Stephen:
The Gunslinger (novelet) ..... Oct. 52
Lanier, Sterling E.:
The Syndicated Time (novella) .... July 6
Letters ..... Aug. 158
..... Oct. 158
McAllister, Bruce:
Missionary Work ..... Dec. 139
Malzberg, Barry N.:
Ring, The Brass Ring, The
Russian And I ..... Aug. 63
Books ..... Aug. 28
A Clone At Last ..... Oct. 50
Mendelsohn, M.:
Little Goethe (novelet) ..... Nov. 34
Milton, Patrice: *The Wind*
Among The Mindymuns ..... Dec. 50
Moore, Raylyn: *No Left Turn,*
No Right Turn, No Thorofare ... Sept. 96
Nelson, R. Faraday: *Nightfall*
On The Dead Sea ..... Sept. 62
Payes, Rachel Cosgrove:
Acrostic Puzzle ..... July 158
Pronzini, Bill: *A Clone At Last* ..... Oct. 50
Cat ..... Nov. 58
Redd, David: *Morning* ..... July 96
Runyon, Charles W.: *The*
Liberation Of Josephine ..... Sept. 80
Russell, Ray:
The Humanic Complex ..... Dec. 84
Saberhagen, Fred:
Smasher (novelet) ..... Aug. 8
Schenck, Hilbert: *The Morphology*
Of The Kirkham Wreck
(novelet) ..... Sept. 131
Searles, Baird: *Films and Television*
Ad Infinitum, Ad Nauseum ..... July 114
Losses ..... Aug. 69
The Fury Most Foul ..... Sept. 77
Fantasia ..... Oct. 91
An Oddity By Homer ..... Nov. 64
Whimsy One ..... Dec. 47
Wellen, Edward:
Goldbrick (novella) ..... Nov. 95
Wilson, Gahan: *Cartoons* ..... July-Dec.
Yolen, Jane: *Brother Hart* ..... Nov. 6
Young, Robert F.: *Hologirl* ..... Aug. 142
Project Hi-Rise ..... Nov. 22

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

READ IT SLOWLY.

You'll want to. It's that good . . . it's The Hugo Winners: 23 speculative fiction stories that have won the science fiction equivalent of the Oscar —Arthur C. Clarke's superb story, "The Star," Jack Vance's classic, "The Dragon Masters," and Poul Anderson's award-winner, "No Truce With Kings," plus 20 more.

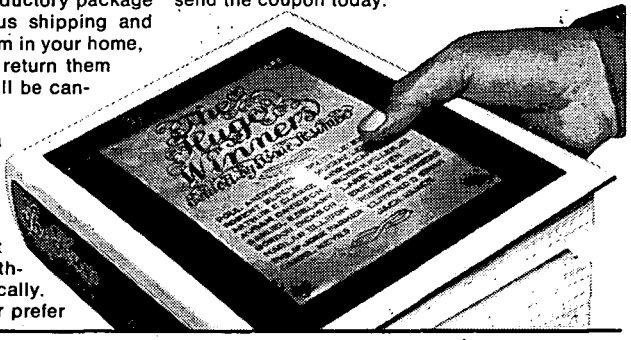
This fabulous 864-page anthology of speculative fiction sells for $15.45 in the original publisher's edition. It's yours, if you wish, as one of 4 books for just 10¢ (plus shipping and handling) when you join The Science Fiction Book Club.

Here's how the Club works:

When your application for membership is accepted, you'll receive your introductory package of four books for just 10¢ (plus shipping and handling). You may examine them in your home, and if not completely satisfied, return them within ten days—membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, *Things to Come*, describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. If you want both Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically. If you don't want a Selection, or prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided, and return it to us by the date specified. We try to allow you at least ten days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days, and receive an unwanted selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter, or remain a member as long as you wish. At least one of the two Selections each month is only $1.98 plus shipping and handling. Other extra-value selections are slightly higher but always much less than Publishers' Editions. Send no money. But do send the coupon today.



ANY 4 SCIENCE FICTION BEST SELLERS FOR JUST 10¢ with membership

Science Fiction Book Club

Dept. TR 003, Garden City, N.Y. 11530

I have read your ad. Please accept me as a member in the Science Fiction Book Club.

Send me, as a beginning, the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated below, and bill me just 10¢ (plus shipping and handling). I agree to take 4 additional books during the coming year and may resign anytime thereafter. SFC books are selections for mature readers.

Mr.
Mrs.
Miss _____
Please print

Address _____ Apt. ____

City _____ State _____ Zip ____

Order not valid without signature.
If under 18, parent must sign.

45-S131

2543 **The Dragonriders of Pern.** By Anne McCaffrey. A mammoth volume containing all three novels: **Dragonflight, Dragonquest** and **The White Dragon.** Special edition.

4465 **Three Hainish Novels.** By Ursula K. Le Guin. One of SF's major talents explores the isolation of humans in alien worlds in **Rocannon's World, Planet of Exile** and **City of Illusions.** Comb. ed. $23.85

4481 **The Far Call.** By Gordon R. Dickson. International jealousy jeopardizes the first manned flight to Mars. Pub. ed. $8.95

2352 **The Illustrated Roger Zelazny.** Edited and adapted by Byron Preiss. A full color, lavishly illustrated edition of stories. Large paperback. Pub. ed. $8.95

2378 **The 1978 Annual World's Best SF.** Edited by Donald A. Wollheim. The best short stories this year by such talent as John Varley, Joe Haldeman and Harlan Ellison. Special ed.

4499 **The Persistence of Vision.** By John Varley. An entertaining collection of short stories by the author of The Ophiuchi Hotline. **Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some.** Pub. ed. $9.95

0372 **Splinter of the Mind's Eye.** By Alan Dean Foster. The further adventures of Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia Organa. Pub. ed. $7.95

7831 **Galactic Empires.** Brian Aldiss, ed. Two-volume anthology of 26 stories by famous authors Clarke, Asimov and others covers the Rise and Fall of Galactic Empires. Comb. ed. $17.90

6221 **The Foundation Trilogy.** By Isaac Asimov. The ends of the galaxy revert to barbarism. An SF classic. Comb. price $20.85

8532 **The Hugo Winners, Vol. I & II.** Giant 2-in-1 volume of 23 award-winning stories, 1955 to 1970. Asimov introduces each. Pub. ed. $15.45

2626 **The Perfect Lover.** By Christopher Priest. A group enters an ideal society projected by their collective unconscious—unaware of the dangers that lurk in their dream world! **Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some.** Pub. ed. $7.95

4382 **The Earth Book of Stormgate.** By Poul Anderson. 11 tales of man's adventures in the galaxy, plus the complete novel, **The Man Who Counts,** with Nicholas van Rijn. Pub. ed. $10.95.

The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save members even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Toronto. Offer slightly different in Canada.

LICENSED FOR PERSONAL USE
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED